Friday, January 2, 2009 ★★ 6 sections / Vol. 24 / No. 25 P18 website: www.inquirer.net

NOT EXACTLY TIMES SQUARE But it will do for now as Makati City Mayor Binay seeks to mimic New York's Times Square vigil every New Year's Eve, which has become one of America's best-loved traditions.

Injuries at all-time low

'Midnight' sheds light on 'bribery'

By Arlyn dela Cruz

JOHNNY MIDNIGHT, THE RADIO announcer who became famous in the '70s and the '80s for promoting "toning" (water therapy) and pyramid healing, said Wednesday there was no way he would be involved in any bribery to have his son released from the custody of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency.

"No way, no chance," Midnight said, putting his hands on his face.

His son Jorge Jordiana Joseph was one of the three young men the PDEA arrested on Sept. 20 in buy-bust operations for possession of some 60 tablets

MIDNIGHT/ A12

SC ruling dream come true for Manila Bay warrior

By Alexis Pepa

FOR THE LAWYER AND LAW PROFESsor who filed the case to clean up the Manila Bay, his recent victory in the Supreme Court is a dream come true.

"This 10-year saga started as a dream to see the bay clean again. Now, I will see the fulfillment of this dream," said Antonio Oposa, a professor at the University of the Philippines College of Law.

Oposa, a longtime resident of Iloilo, Cavite, one of the provinces bordering the bay, saw firsthand the deteriora-

SC RULING/ A12

'Paradise to Paradise' route now open

By Allison W. Lopez

TOURISTS NO LONGER HAVE TO take a circuitous route just to visit Puerto Princesa from Kota Kinabalu or vice versa. The two cities boast of three World Heritage sites.

But its first international route, Southeast Asian Airlines (SeaAir) flew a 32-seat plane to the capital of Sabah

PARADISE/ A12

THE HEART OF A CITY Baguio residents were not just counting the hours toward a new year but closer to home, they were marking the hours to their city's centennial year. Burnham Park named after Daniel Burnham, the architect commissioned by the US colonial government to design the country's summer capital, is like the heart of the old city which is also going to get all spruced up for its 100th birthday. (Story on Page A11.)

Pinoys party in Metro like New Yorkers

By Marlen Ramos and Miko Morales

MANY FILIPINOS ARE LEARNing to disdain the traditionally raucous—and harmful—way of greeting the New Year. On New Year's Eve, thousands of revelers welcomed 2009 partying a la New Yorkers in street parties sponsored by local government in Metro Manila.

In Makati, Mayor Jejomar Binay led the countdown to usher in 2009 and bid goodbye to the troubled year that was 2008.

"If New York (the United States), Sydney (Australia) and Moscow (Russia) have their own grand celebration, this is our version," Binay said.

"This is also our way to

PINOYS/ A6

Officials thank heavens for rain

By Dona Pazzibugan, Jocelyn R. Uy, Beverly T. Natividad and Inquirer Visayas

FILIPINOS BADE 2008 adieu and welcomed 2009 with revelry and mayhem that left six people dead, but the number of revelers injured by fireworks fell to an all-time low, officials said yesterday.

They attributed the drop in the number of injuries from fireworks to high humidity—which brought rain and showers to Metro Manila and nearby provinces on New Year's Eve—as well as to the scare campaign against firecrackers and the economic crunch.

As of 8 a.m. yesterday, the Department of Health (DOH) said 546 cases of fireworks-related injuries had been reported to its 50 monitoring hospitals around the country since Dec. 21.

This is the lowest number of injuries recorded over the same period since the DOH began monitoring the cause of injuries

INJURIES/ A6

Don't focus resolutions on flaws, says UK agency

LONDON—MAKING SELFimprovement New Year's resolutions often leaves people feeling worse, the British mental health charity Mind warned Thursday.

Mind urged people not to make resolutions focusing on physical imperfections—such as attempting to lose weight—because they create a negative self image and lead to feelings of low self-esteem, hopelessness and even mild depression.

And when such optimistic resolutions fail, that could spark feelings of inadequacy and failure, the charity warned.

DON'T FOCUS/ A7

WARM SMILE Freezing temperatures in New York, but this woman welcomes '09 in sunny California. AFP

2008 exits amid int'l revelry, war in Mideast, Thai tragedy

NEW YORK—REVELERS RANG in the New Year in the Americas, hard on the heels of celebrations in Europe and Asia, as global economic jitters, conflict in the Middle East and tragedy in Thailand cast a long shadow on the dawn of 2009.

Up to one million people braved frigid temperatures in New York City to witness the traditional midnight dropping of the Times Square crystal ball as confetti rained down from skyscrapers and fireworks filled the sky.

Crowds shouted out the last seconds of the year as the huge orb—glowing and glittering through 2,668 crystals and more than 32,000 red, blue, green and white LED bulbs—descended a special pillar, signaling the end of a historic year that saw the election of the first black US president

2008/ A7

WHAT'S INSIDE

Bangkok nightclub fire kills 61 New Year's Eve revelers
WORLD/ A17

Israel, Hamas reject truce; attack toll hits 400
WORLD / A18

Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

TODAY: Scattered showers and thunderstorms

Farmers go online to oust DAR exec

STATUES AND FRIENDS
Families spend the first day of the year strolling and relaxing beside Manila Bay.

By Alexis Pupa

THEIR HANDS ARE ROUGH AND COVERED WITH CALLUSES from working the earth with plowshares and rudimentary farm implements. But this did not prevent some 65 farmers from going online to sign a petition for the ouster of Agrarian Reform Secretary Nasser Pangandaman and for a revamp of the department.

"Some of us had a hard time working the keyboard. Our hands are already hard and stiff from using our plowshares all our lives," said Ramon Diaz, president of the Hacienda Yulo Farmers Alliance based in Laguna.

It is a new and unfamiliar way in the farmers' campaign for genuine land reform, one that eschews strongly worded placards and noisy rallies. But the resolve of the farmers never faltered, Diaz said.

"The DAR has never supported the farmers in their struggle. All the time that he [Pangandaman] has been there, the department has never produced good results for the farmers," Diaz said, adding that more farmers have indicated their desire to sign the online petition.

The Hacienda Yulo farmers are calling on the DAR to void an order exempting from land reform 3,256 hectares of the hacienda's 7,100 hectares, said Virgie Mendoza, spokesperson for the farmers.

Exemption order

Mendoza said the exemption order was first handed down in 2005 to pave the way for the conversion of the land for industrial and commercial purposes. But no development has been undertaken while the farmers have been deprived of their livelihood, she said.

The online campaign against the ouster of Pangandaman was also partly inspired by the reported involvement of Pangandaman's sons in a brawl with members of the De la Paz family at the Valley Golf and Country Club in Antipolo last week.

According to the text of the petition, posted on petitiononline.com, the Antipolo incident "revealed how gross powers can make of officials without the shortcomings of modesty and decency."

"The incident between the Pangandaman and the De la Pazes reminds us of government officials' abuse of power, including converting agriculture-productive lands into mega golf courses nationwide. In the case of golf courses constructed within the Subic landholdings as well as Valley Golf in Antipolo, farmers are disenfranchised of their right to own lands," the petition read.

"Since last year, we have called for the resignation of Mr. Pangandaman as DAR secretary... We urge the public to join us in this call. The farmers and the public do not deserve this kind of leader."

In a phone interview, Pangandaman refused to comment on the petition, except to say "I am not resigning. I don't want to comment further. It may just prolong the issue."

Members of the Peace Foundation, who are supporting the 400 Hacienda Yulo farmers, yesterday facilitated the farmers' entry into the digital world. The farmers were given a crash course in the use of the computer and the Internet at their makeshift camp in front of the DAR office in Quezon City.

The founder's daughter Gemma Lumanta said the farmers were interested and attentive. "Not the first time farmers had a rough time with the keyboard. So after that, we gave the others assistance."

He said they brought along a laptop, a wireless Internet connection and a projector for their lecture.

"But we had some problems with the connection. So we are typing out all the information and will upload the petition later," Lumanta explained.

The activity was also kicked off by a blues celebrated by activist priest Robert Reyes.

Homily

In his homily, the activist priest said it would be useful for the farmers to learn to use the Internet. "Wouldn't it be nice if all farmers' organizations like yours will have Internet connection?" he said, to the amusement of the farmers.

Reyes also said their online petition was an expression of their anger at Pangandaman and the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

"Do not apologize for your anger. Don't let anyone take that anger away from you. Your anger comes from God, who together with you, is also angry," the priest said.

The CARP law was supposed to expire last September but Congress passed a resolution extending it for another six months. But the terms of the extension do not compel landowners to give up their land. Hundreds of Mangagal Aetayo has yet to sign the resolution.

'Talk economics, not politics'

By TJ Burgonio

MALACAÑANG OFFICIALS YESTERday scuffled at forecasts that the Arroyo administration would recast its final push for Charter change this year to extend the President's term beyond 2010.

"Whatever the administration does, the President's critics will always see ghosts, shadows and goblins of term extension," Political Affairs Secretary Gabriel Claudio said in a text message.

The government, he said, would rather focus on effective governance in a bid to shield the economy and people from the global financial crisis, and prepare the country for the May 2010 nationwide elections.

"Priority government will also include preparations for 2010, particularly in terms of ensuring clean, honest, orderly and credible elections," Claudio added.

The opposition Black & White Movement, has vowed to block the administration's drive to rewrite the 1987 Constitution, suspecting that it is meant to extend Ms Arroyo's stay in power.

Press Secretary Jesus Dureza, for his part, declined to comment on statements by "critics whose hearts and minds are still consumed by political fears."

"We hope the spirit of the new year brings fresh and positive thoughts and for all to be united behind the President's focused efforts to prepare the nation to weather the challenges ahead in 2009," he said.

Contingency plans

On the eve of New Year's Day in Baguio, where Ms Pilar Bucoy is on a holiday break, Ms Arroyo refused to talk about her political plans in 2013.

"Politics is not foremost in my mind. If I were always thinking about politics, I would not have been able to build all those roads in the Cordillera and all those [projects]," the Office of the Press Secretary quoted her as telling the media last Wednesday. "So let's talk economics, not politics."

She went on to talk about the government's contingency plans against the global recession.

The administration-dominated House of Representatives is spearheading a move to convene the chamber and the Senate into a unicameral assembly to amend or revise the Charter.

The move, if it prospers, could open the floodgates for the indefinite duration of reforms, including lifting the President's term limits or paving the way for a shift to a parliamentary form of government, critics said.

After a storm of criticism from Catholic bishops, the political opposition and civic leaders, administration lawmakers imposed a moratorium on Charter change debate during the holidays.

Former IBP official nabbed

By Nancy C. Carvajal

A FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE Integrated Bar of the Philippines was arrested yesterday for allegedly pointing a gun at a Quezon City barangay official.

Jose Cruzillon, 61, a resident of 318 Golden Bay Hotel, Roxas Boulevard, Pasay City, was charged with illegal possession of firearms, grave threats and direct assault in the city prosecutor's office yesterday morning, according to a police officer.

Responding to 911 Amoranto Exercise of Police Station 10 in Kamuning, Quezon City, Cruzillon was accused by Magdalena Mabasa, an official of Barangay Roxas in Quezon City, of pointing his gun at her and several others in front of her house on Champaca Street at around 4 a.m.

Based on the initial investigation, Cruzillon was on board his Mitsubishi Lancer with his son and had stopped in front of Mabasa's house.

One of the complainants supposedly shouted at the just-to-date their headlights that "were directly turned on them."

"This apparently irked the lawyer who got out of the vehicle and allegedly pointed his gun at the complainants," Inverso said.

The lawyer was later released on bail.

PEACE AND SOLITUDE Manila's Baywalk is a favorite spot for hikers and bike fishers. Some simply want to contemplate the New Year with quiet moments by the Bay.

Welders coming home

By Jerome Aning

TEN MORE FILIPINO WELDERS who were reported stranded in Qatar after they were laid off have agreed on a settlement with their employer and will be returning home next week.

One of the welders, Willy Cudias, was quoted by the Qatar daily The Peninsula as saying yesterday that he and his companions have been given their back wages and the money for their tickets to the Philippines.

Cudias said they would arrive in Manila either on Jan. 8 or Jan. 9.

The welders' case attracted media attention in the Philippines after they were reported to be without shelter and were begging at a fish market in Doha, Qatar's capital.

Vice President Noli de Castro, presidential adviser on overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), heard of the welders' plight and requested the labor department to assist them.

Middle East chapters of Migrante International, an alliance of Filipino migrant groups, even launched an online petition against the Philippine labor attache in Qatar, Hector Cruz, for allegedly not giving enough help to the welders.

The welders, who were deployed in April 2007, were laid off four months ago after the construction firm they were working for closed down. They remained in Qatar to file a complaint against their employers before the Qatar labor ministry's arbitration department.

The Peninsula report quoted Cruz as denying that he failed to help the welders.

Cruz said he was "dishonored?" by reports that he did not help the OFWs, adding that he had explained to them what their legal options were and the procedures in filing their complaint.

More Asian markets eyed by tourism officials

By Kristine L. Alave

THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT IS LOOKing other Asian travelers to counteract the decrease in the arrival of tourists from traditional markets like the United States and Japan, officials have been hastily lamented by the global financial meltdown.

Tourism Secretary Ace Durano said the Philippines is eyeing more tourists from China and India, both of which have a growing middle class, to offset the drop in other segments. The Department of Tourism (DOT) is also optimistic that more tourists from Australia and Hong Kong would visit the country.

"The focus on Asian travel lawyers and airlines is timely, as there are many opportunities to be tapped with the emergence of the middle-class in China and India, as well as other source markets in the region," Durano stressed.

In the recent ITB Asia convention in Singapore, the Philippine booth was one of the most popular, reflecting travelers' growing interest in the Philippines, Durano said.

According to DOT data, the top tourist groups in the Philippines are South Koreans, Americans and Japanese. Tourism officials said there could be a drop in the arrivals of these visitors as their economies were in recession.

Travel experts said they see a trend of Asian travelers heading the region, which would be a boon for the tourism industry in many Asian countries.

In a recent talk, Peter Long, CEO of TUI Travel Plc, a leading European leisure travel company in Europe, said they expected to see another 500 to 700 million people travelling from and within Asia over the next five years—"and mainly to other Asian destinations."

The DOT has recognized the potential of Asian tourists and hopes that it could find recognition among regional travelers.

TXT iNFO MORNING HOROSCOPE FOR JANUARY 2, 2009 24 63 47 36 11 JACKPOT: P10,087,175.47

GenSan blast: 25 hurt

GENERAL SANTOS CITY—TWENTY-FIVE people were reported injured by a grenade lobbed into a crowd at New Year revelers' barbecue evening at the Oval Plaza here.

It was the latest in a spate of bomb blasts in restive Mindanao island.

Among the injured were two police officers—PO3 Jayzer Palea and PO2 Reinelyn Lacsinpech—rushed to help secure the park where the "Bonbons na Gensan 2009" celebrations were held.

One victim, Michelle Buenavero, remained in critical condition at the General Santos Doctor's Hospital.

Police authorities said an unidentified man threw the grenade into the crowd at 9:10 p.m.

The safety pin of a grenade was recovered by the police near a booth at the western portion of the plaza, about 30 meters from the explosion site, according to Mayor Pedro Acharon Jr.

Intelligence reports

The mayor declined to pin the blame on any group, but said there was a group that was "trying to disturb our celebration."

Pasidsiran sa Gensan is an annual holiday event staged by the city government. It includes a carnival fair, flea market, parilan and display booths of various barangays.

Acharon admitted that as early as last week, he had received reports that a certain group would stage attacks in the Central Mindanao area.

The blast was the second bomb attack here in the past few days.

On Tuesday, two civilians and a policeman were injured when an unidentified motorcycle-riding man tossed a grenade at a police outpost in the intersection of Jose Catolico Avenue and Thompson Street in Lagao Village at around 7:20 p.m.

Meanwhile, in Pikit, Sulu, five minors were wounded when an undetermined type of explosive went off in Barangay Umanggay around 11:30 p.m. on Wednesday. Peace process official Ambubakar Ampatuan said the victims included two girls and three boys, aged 12-17. They are being treated at a hospital, he added.

In Zamboanga City, police defused a powerful bomb made from an 81-mm mortar round found in an alumni shirt which was found yesterday morning near a bus terminal in Barangay Guiwan.

Another bomb, hidden in a sack of charcoal, exploded in a parkway at a checkpoint in Sultan Kudarat province's Esperanza town late Tuesday, killing the driver and seriously wounding a policeman, inspecting the vehicle, provincial police chief Superintendent Rudyar Bhoggao said.

Another bomb was found in a passenger bus in extremist-prevented in Sultan Kudarat on Wednesday. The bomb was safely defused.

The attacks have heightened a security alert that has been raised in the south due to intelligence reports cited by Army officials about a plan to bomb various targets by Islamic guerrillas.

MILF denies role

MILF spokesman Eid Kabalu denied their group was behind the bombings.

Peace talks between the government and the MILF collapsed last August.

Apart from the MILF, Mindanao is also home to extremist Abu Sayyaf rebels, said to be linked to the al Qaeda terror network. Agustin Zoleta and John Aldaba, Inquirer Mindanao, with AFP and AP

THE MORNING AFTER After a night of merrymaking that marked the end of the old year, this man takes a closing on the breakwater of the Manila Bay.

Naia awaits okay from ISO

By Jovenne Rivera

INSPECTORS SENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL Standards Organization (ISO) have wrapped up an audit of the operations and procedures at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Naia), and airport officials are hoping the country's premier gateway will make the grade.

Alfonso Cusi, general manager of the Manila International Airport Authority (MIAA), said he is optimistic that the Naia will finally get the coveted ISO certification, which is awarded by the world body in Geneva, Switzerland.

The results may be known to a few weeks, added Miss assistant general manager Tina Serrano.

The ISO, established in 1947, certifies a private enterprise's adherence to world-wide industrial and commercial standards of excellence.

"We are a few steps away from our dream—to obtain the most coveted ISO Certification for Naia," Cusi said in a statement.

He said the challenge was to make all major airport processes, including the arrival and departure area, "predictable" and to maintain these standards at all times.

The ISO auditors from body conducted its comprehensive audit last Dec. 15, said Serrano in an interview with reporters.

Awaiting results

"We have it from the distinguished external auditors that we have, more or less, handled the major tests and we are being recommended for ISO Certification in the coming weeks. All of these processes shall become Naia's passport to passers per confidence," Serrano said.

In August 2005, the Miss launched its Quality Management System, headed by Serrano, to begin the quest for ISO certification.

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ng Iglesia Ni Cristo

SA KASAYSAYAN ng Iglesia ni Cristo, sa panahon ni Ka Eraño "Erdy" Manalo, lumawak nang husto ang kapatiran at pananampalatayang Iglesia ni Cristo hindi lamang sa bansa kundi sa buong mundo.

At bago pa man nagkaroon ng programa sa reporma sa lupa ang pamahalaan, nanguna na si Ka Erdy noong 1965 sa pagpapatupad ng repormang agraryo na pinangunahan ng kapatirang Iglesia sa pagtatayo ng mga modelong resettlement farms sa Palayan City, Nueva Ecija, Cavite, Rizal at iba pang probinsya. Patunay ito na si Ka Erdy ay hindi lamang isang aktibong ministro sa pananampalataya sa Diyos, kundi isa ring dakilang lider tungo sa pagpapaunlad ng kalagayan ng mahihirap lalo na ang magbubukid.

Kaya naman, sa kanyang ika-84 kaarawan ngayong ika-2 ng Enero 2009, muling nagpupugay ang inyong lingkod, Gobernador Ayong S. Maliksi, kasama ang aking mga mahal sa buhay at kababayan sa lalawigan ng Cavite.

MAALAB NA PAGBATI AT MALIGAYANG KAARAWAN, KA ERDY!

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Gobernador, Lalawigan ng Cavite

MANNY MALIKSI
Mayor, Bayan ng Imus

CAVITE
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Not in a fighting mood

By Michael Lim Ubac

THE NEW MINORITY IN THE SENATE is in no mood to wage war with Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile and his supporters in the chamber this year.

Opposition Sen. Alan Peter Cayetano, a chief confidant of deposed Senate President Manuel Villar Jr., told reporters yesterday that the latter had no plans of reclaiming the third most powerful elective post in the land in the near low months.

Villar would rather focus his energy on a much bigger battle—the presidential contest in May 2010, said Cayetano.

Villar and his remaining supporters in the chamber—minority leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr., Juhn Ejercito, Alan and Pia Cayetano and former majority leader Francis Pangilinan—are now outnumbered, following the Nov. 17, 2008 coup that installed Enrile and changed the political landscape in the Senate in one fell swoop.

But Cayetano offered a different reason why the Villar camp was not about to hatch a coup plot to wrest the presidency from Enrile.

Cayetano said Enrile could remain at the helm of the Senate, although there would be realignments in preparation for the presidential polls in 2010.

"Enrile might be safe throughout (in terms) because the realignment can happen while he maintains his post as Senate president. But it would really depend on the survey ratings of presidential bets and personal relationships among senators. Many of the bets would rather have JPE (Enrile) there rather than a fellow candidate," said Cayetano.

He added that the coup led by senators Rodolfo Lacson, Lovel Legarda, Mar Roxas, Jinggoy Estrada and Antonio Trillanes IV was not really necessary.

Said Cayetano: "He (Villar) was planning to hand over the Senate presidency in the middle of 2009 to another senator precisely because he needed time to campaign, and the administration and political responsibilities of the Senate were tying him down."

"While it was an honor and privilege to serve as Senate president, it was also demanding," he added. "Right now, he feels he has been freed of those responsibilities so he seems to rejuvenate himself and get people to know who is the real Manny Villar."

To date, only Villar has declared his presidential bid. Legarda, Roxas, Lacson, Francis Escudero and Richard Gordon have not been as vocal about their reported presidential ambitions.

Food aid for kids in day care

By Nikko Dizon

MORE THAN 850,000 CHILDREN NATIONwide received over 17 million kilos of rice under the government's food-for-school program in the first two quarters of 2008, the Department of Social Welfare and Development said in its biannual report that highlighted the Arroyo administration's "pro-poor programs."

The report said that from January to August 2008, some 819,979 children in 29,084 government-run day care centers in 1,099 cities and municipalities all over the country benefited from the program.

A total of 17,376,332 kilos of government-subsidized rice from the National Food Authority (NFA) were distributed to children in the day care centers in 91 rice distribution days, the report added.

Beneficiaries for the months of September to December have not yet been included in the report.

The food-for-school program is a sub-component of the Sentrosured Hunger Mitigation Program where day care children and their families receive one kilo of iron-fortified rice per day as long as the children were present in school.

Apart from awakening parents to prioritize their children's education, the program also aims to "improve" the recipient family's nutrition profile as well as the parents' knowledge on basic nutrition and effective parenting through Nutrisa Effectiveness Service sessions.

However, a Commission on Audit report in 2007 said the program had become more of a burden than a relief to parents and teachers because of poor distribution.

The report said students, parents and school officials had to spend their own money to transport rice sacks from NFA drop-off points to their schools and that they received "poor quality" rice.

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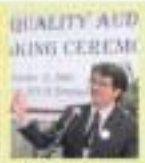

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NINOY AQUINO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Injuries at all-time low, says DOH

From page A1

saving in firecracker-related cases years ago.

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III credited the department's scare campaign, which showed him lambasting a targeted area on television so users would be firecracker victims of possible impersonation, for the big drop.

But Duque conceded that the rain-drowned core Metro Manila also deterred those who might have intended to welcome 2009 with firecracker blasts.

"This is an all-time low. We are well below the lowest registered number of injuries in 2002 (513 cases)," the DOH's National Epidemiology Center director, Dr. Eric Tayag, said.

Nature helped

"Nature also cooperated with us," Duque said at a news conference.

"This is the first time I can remember in my 51 years of existence that New Year's Eve has been so wet, so people had second thoughts whether they wanted to buy and light up their firecrackers," he said.

Weather bureau chief Nathaniel Cruz also said the rules helped dampen the enthusiasm of revelers.

"We should be thankful there were some rains. There weren't so many who lit firecrackers. The smoke could have been worse," he said.

Officials said economic hardships also kept Filipinos from splurging on firecrackers.

"The worsening global economic condition could also step until explain the low figures we have," Bro. Armando Perez quoted Duque as also saying.

Still, firecracker explosions thundered across the metropolis and in the sky tinged midnight on Wednesday, but these were brief compared to long, frenzied celebrations by some of the previous years.

SHORESCREEN His big brew but layers upon layers of smoke after the firecrackers and other pyrotechnic devices had been fired. VINCENT CRUZ

THE FESTIVE VIEW The celebration is all over the city including the assault at the Mall of Asia in Pasay City. ARCHIVE PHOTO

Six dead

Three people were killed in metro Manila and three in Bulacan province during the merrymaking.

One of the fatalities was Renato Pobiana, 18, of North Bay Boulevard North in Navotas, who was standing around watching the revelry when a thrown firecracker exploded in his face, the Northern Police District said.

He was dead on arrival at the hospital, the NPD said.

Another victim, Alberto Perez, 50, of San Francisco Del Monte, Quezon City, was killed when a stray bullet hit him also in the face while he was watching fireworks from a terrace at around 11:45 p.m., police said.

A third fatality was prelude victim Pablo Gallo, of Dagupay Street in Bagumbayan, Manila, who was hit by pellets fired from a catapult (an improvised weapon) used by rival watching groups in his neighborhood, the Manila police said.

Drunken brawls

Two people were shot dead following a quarrel during a drinking session in a billiard hall in Malabon, Metro Manila the New Year's Eve revelry down, according to the police.

Jessica Zapi, Ricardo de la Paz, Bulacan provincial police director, said the alleged gunman, Allan Cruzat, got into an argument with his drinking companions, were home, returned with a gun, and shot them, killing two and wounding three others.

Police identified the two fatalities as Benedicto Pita and Ronald Amor.

The celebration in San Rafael, Bulacan also turned tragic when Dominic Delvoja was stabbed dead during a drunken brawl, police said.

Three deaths related to fireworks were reported during last year's celebrations: Two died from wounds due to firecracker injuries and another from swallowing aerosol.

Code white

Despite the lower number of injuries related to fireworks, Duque extended the Code White alert in all DOH hospitals until the end of the long weekend holiday on Jan. 5, in case people would still light firecrackers once the night skies clear up.

Under Code White alert, public hospitals under the DOH should be ready to accept emergency patients in big numbers.

"Precisely because it was a rainy New Year's Eve and [because of the extended holiday], people might start exploding firecrackers now," said Duque, who was in mid-sentence when a firecracker explosion sounded on the distance.

The 546 fireworks-related injuries counted by 50 DOH "sentinel hospitals" are 25 percent, or 88 cases, lower than those recorded during the same period last year, and 33 percent, or 417 cases, lower than the four-year average for the same period, according to DOH figures.

The DOH said among those who sustained firecracker injuries, 127 (38 percent) were children less than 10 years old.

Half of those injured were nave passive bystanders. Three out of four victims were males. The youngest victim was an 8-month-old baby who was injured by a firecracker.

An 8-year-old boy from Project 8, Quezon City, lost his entire right hand when a pla-pla he found in the street exploded in his hand.

The boy was among 18 firecracker victims who had to undergo amputation, two of whom lost an entire hand.

Piccolo is main culprit

The DOH said 76 victims sustained eye injuries, while 261 victims sustained varying degrees of blast and burn injuries.

The Philippine National Police said 36 people were wounded by stray bullets, compared to 53 last year.

Piccolo, which has been banned by the DOH, remained the top cause of firecracker-related injuries.

The other four firecrackers that caused the most injuries were kwitis (also known as bin-atan (which is also illegal), lawa (sparklers) and whistle bomb.

Tayag said a new variety of dangerous firecracker came out this year, a 6-inch dynamite-like firecracker called cometa.

Duque said all firecracker injuries should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and water and examined by a doctor for wounds thoroughly cleaning.

He said those injured should make sure to get anti-tetanus shots since tetanus from firecracker burns could lead to death if untreated.

During last year's revelry the DOH recorded 946 cases of fireworks-related injuries from Dec. 21, 2007 to Jan. 1, 2008.

PNP: 'Generally peaceful'

PNP Director General Jesus Versoza declared the New Year festivities as "generally peaceful," He said there was a 50 percent drop in the number of firecracker-related accidents this year compared to last year.

The PNP figures differed from those of the DOH. It said 932 people were injured this year as against 826 last year.

Versoza attributed the "seeming" improvement to the extra manhours policemen in the field exerted against the sale of illegal firecrackers and indiscriminate firing of guns.

Three people in Zamboanga City were among those injured by stray bullets, including journalist Felito Jamon of TV11, who was inside his house when a bullet pierced through the roof and hit him in the leg, police said.

In Jolo, Sulu, a woman was injured when a stray bullet struck her on the chin.

Even though many Muslims do not celebrate the Gregorian calendar's New Year, some would fire their guns or explode firecrackers in defiance to the tradition of their Christian neighbors.

In Davao City, "three massacre casualties, six fire victims and an indiscriminate firing reported," Senior Supt. Ramon Apolinario, city police director, said.

Mayor Rodrigo Duterte has warned violators their possession of firecrackers would land them in jail.

Police also reported a lower casualty of firecracker-related injuries in the Southern Tagalog and the Bicol regions. They attributed this to the ration and to police operations against firecracker traders.

Only one hospitals in Cuenca City reported treating only two firecracker victims.

"Most of the residents were forced to stay indoors, contented with just blowing horns and banging pots and pans. The rain was a blessing in disguise," said one patrolman.

Seven people were hit by stray bullets in Cebu, including a 10-year-old girl. They were declared out of danger. With reports from Jeannette J. Andrade, Victor F. Boiser Jr., Alexis Romero, Inquirer Visayas; Julie Alipala, Orlando Dinoy, Ethelo Fernandez, Dennis Santos, Franklin Caliguid and Tyrus Rosario, Inquirer Mindanao; Gabriel Carbonnel, Yolanda Ximén, Villamor Visaya Jr., Eli Espiritu and Vincent Cabreza, Inquirer Northern Luzon; and Russell Arubio, Analiza Bayan, Yvette Orejas and Cesar Villa, Inquirer Central Luzon, and Delfin T. Mallari Jr., Rizalde O. Rivera, Marlon Otiso and Jun Ben Ibarlla, Inquirer Southern Luzon; and AP

Environment New Year's Eve revelry loser

By Christian V. Esguerra

SO YOU WELCOMED 2009 WITH A BANG but in the eyes of environmentalists like Mahar Lagmay, you also threw your love to the New Year's Eve revelry on Wednesday—the environment.

Abueva, the presidential adviser on global warming and climate change, expressed dismay over what he said was the general disregard for the environmental impact of exploding firecrackers on much the eve of the old year.

He said much of the blame should be placed on members of the middle class who came out with "big guns that exploded like bombs."

Unlike them, the poor were limited to small firecrackers and their emotions were largely held back by the evening downpour, Abueva said.

"We're still very Oriental in our thinking that firecrackers drive away evil spirits," Abueva said.

"We are not aware that we are creating a new demon that will devour our very existence."

Abueva pointed at the various predictions of global warming, one of the main contributors being carbon dioxide emissions.

When he was environment secretary in 2005, Abueva said his agency recorded a 2,000-percent increase in carbon dioxide emissions as a result of firecracker explosions during New Year celebrations in urban areas.

He said it would be no surprise if a similar set today would reveal another enormous leap in carbon dioxide emissions.

Besides the middle class, Abueva also denounced the companies that manufacture the more sophisticated types of pyrotechnics.

"There were organized steps to explode more firecrackers from people who were supposed to better understand the issue of climate change," he lamented.

"Private companies should be banned from manufacturing firecrackers."

Abueva attended the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Poznan, Poland, where it was deemed that the problem of global warming could reach its "tipping point" in 50 years.

By then, we would have altered the world's temperature by two degrees Centigrade from pre-Industrial Revolution levels, "he said.

He warned that the natural repercussions would be intense flooding in low-lying areas, some of which he identified as Manila, Malabon, Caloocan and Cebu.

"More than 60 percent of our living space would be under water," he said.

Abueva said part of the solution would be a clear change in the public's mentality on issues such as firecracker use.

The government, for instance, should expand its campaign against firecrackers beyond the idea of "protecting people from harming themselves," he said.

The government in the past came out with advertisements showing gory images of body parts wounded in firecracker explosions. They were meant to discourage the public from using pyrotechnics by learning from others' mistakes.

"The injuries are bigger and the costs serious with global warming," Abueva said. "We're threatening our way of life, our very civilization."

The Daily Gospel

Friday, January 2, 2009
Before Epiphany
Basil the Great / Gregory Nazianzen

1st Reading: 1 Jn 2:22-28
Gospel: Jn 1:19-28

This was the testimony of John when the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?" John recognized the truth and did not deny it. He said, "I am not the Messiah."

And they asked him, "Then who are you? Elijah?" He answered, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" "No," he answered. "No."

Then they said to him, "Tell us who you are, so that we can give some answer to those who sent us. How do you see yourself?" And John said, quoting the prophet Isaiah, "I am the voice crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord." Those who had been sent were Pharisees. They asked him, "Then why do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?" John answered, "I baptize you with water, but among you stands one whom you do not know, although he comes after me, I am not worthy to untie the straps of his sandals."

This happened in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Commentary

"Who are you?" Just as this question was asked of John the Baptist, it still as often as not be asked of us, especially when we demand that we see proof of our Christian identity. We are challenged to show that what we prepared the way of the Lord, always by telling the people following the real result, regardless of how difficult it may be for them to hear it, rather than telling them what they wanted to hear.

Was it to be satan, a follower of Christ? This is the truth at the core of our Faith. It is the source of our confidence and our commitment to stand up for Christ in our everyday lives. It is the basis of our identity and salvation as Christians. This is the source of our compassion, which we must share with the world, especially when we meet those who are crying out in their wilderness of loss, pain and confusion. As it was with John, may we be the voice that strengthens them, dispels their doubts and gives them hope in the eternal command: "Make straight the way of the Lord!"

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Pinoys party in Metro streets like New Yorkers

From page A1

share love and in local Filipinos in welcoming 2009 with hope and optimism."

In neighboring Bonifacio Global City crowds of red, yellow and green lit up the sky above The Fort where the Taguig city government threw a New Year countdown and street party for around 5,000 people, highlighted by a spectacular 15-minute fireworks presentation by the award-winning La Mancha pyrotechnics group.

At the SM Mall of Asia in Pasay City, musicians and entertainers of the GMA 7 television network sponsored a grand party, to the delight of their fans and supporters.

Rained out

Some 10,000 people, under the manifold eye of 150 policemen, showed up at the Makati street party held at the corner of Ayala and Makati Avenues despite the intermittent showers.

"If not for the drizzle, more people could have come and celebrated with us," Binay said.

The annual New Year countdown party in Makati also served as a fundraising event for the 400-GDR Foundation's "Bagip Kapamilya" or help-call-for families.

To keep the crowd entertained, rock bands like Sandwich, Blue Rototop, the Eraserheads and Brownman Revival performed their hit songs and revved up the crowd.

Dancing lights

Shortly before the stroke of midnight, Binay went up the makeshift stage and led the official countdown to 2009 as a splendid 15-minute fireworks display sponsored by the city government lit up the skies.

As the clock struck midnight at The Fort, organizers let loose a spectacle of light that seemed to dance to the rhythm of the music playing over the background.

As fireworks exploded in crimson and light green hues, yellow sparks formed a line of small rocket bursts, in cheers and applause from the crowd that packed the corner of 5th Avenue and 28th Street.

Lights from thousands of clicking cameras flashed incessantly as people tried to get a snapshot of the display, which organizers have broken up over the New Year, while some hugged the person next to them.

The display was executed from the La Mancha pyrotechnics that won third place in a fireworks competition in Moscow, Germany. La Mancha was one of the organizers of the World Pyrotechnics held in the Philippines in 2005 and 2006.

"Years ago firstlimit than I heard, people loved last night's fireworks display because it shot up really high," said Senior Supt. Camilo Cascolan.

People started to trickle in at around 9 p.m., said Cascolan, who kept watch with a contingent of the Taguig police, after the party started around 11 a.m., the police chief said he noticed more people arriving and the parking lots filling up with more cars.

P1-M prize money

Of those who attended the Makati event, Bogus Bella almost went home the champion. But Bella narrowly missed taking home the grand prize, P1 million grand prize of the night's raffle draw.

Bella only got to identify 14 Makati City logos, just two short to win the top prize, from the more than seven flashed on the giant screen onstage, according to Fel Lim, one of the event organizers.

Lovelyn Nonoba and Princess Saja also had their names on the ticket for P1 million prize, being among the 15 lucky partygoers who were selected by raffle draw to play the game.

Nonoba and Saja only successfully identified eight and three Makati logos, respectively.

The draw each took home P50,000 in cash, plus cited a digital camera, Apple Ipod and Sony Playstation Portable game console.

Participants needed only to donate any amount to the foundation to get one raffle stub.

"Although nobody won the P1 million, it was a successful night for the Foundation," Lim said.

Low-key celebration

A spectacular fireworks display that marked the start of the summer capital's centennial celebrations on Wednesday provided the glitter to President Macapagal-Arroyo's low-key New Year's Eve as the Philippines' Pearl of the Orient Seas welcomed the holidays since Dec. 26.

A frigate resident tried to promote a counter-firecracker campaign by flying kites.

Dr. Cielito Habito launched three giant kites, emblazoned with "Happy New Year" greetings. The largest kite measured 20 feet wide. Filomeo said he wanted to engage people in fun-filled ways of greeting the New Year. With a report from Vincent Cabreza, Inquirer Northern Luzon

EX-PRESIDENT Bill Clinton and Sen. Hillary Clinton dance to the beat of New Year music in Times Square, New York City. The Clintons are special guests in the annual countdown to a new year. They help City Mayor Bloomberg bring down the crystal ball. AP

WORLD WELCOMES NEW YEAR

ANCIENT TREASURE ILLUMINED Fireworks burst over the ancient temple of the Parthenon at the Acropolis Hill in Athens. AFP

MORE FIREWORKS A pyrotechnic show rents Marina Bay and the Esplanade ablaze in Singapore. REUTERS

THAT TOWERING FEELING Fireworks explode near the Kuala Lumpur landmark, the Petronas Twin Towers. REUTERS

"THE CREATION STORM" That's the theme of the choreographed fireworks displays over the Sydney Harbor Bridge and Opera House. It drawn hundreds of thousands of revelers to watch the spectacle. REUTERS

MASS PARTY Over at Causeway Bay in Hong Kong, thousands take to the street to frolic. AP

2008 exits amid int'l revelry, war in Mideast, Thai tragedy

From page A1

and the worst economic crisis in decades.

As the clock struck midnight, a ton of confetti rained down while the New York city triggered fireworks.

But the new year also brought tragedy, as at least 61 revelers died in a fire that swept through a popular nightclub in Bangkok, with at least 200 injured. (See story in World, Page A17.)

In the splendor of St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Benedict XVI called for "tolerance and solidarity" in 2009. He said he hoped "violence, hatred and mistrust" would not prevail in the world, notably in the Middle East.

During vespers service on Wednesday, the Pope said the years were "marked by uncertainty and worry for the future" but urged people not to be afraid and to help each other.

In India, where tensions with neighboring Pakistan remain all pervasive, Mumbai was marked by tight security after the trauma of the November terror attacks that left 172 people dead.

Indian police kept six especially close hands on traditional feast parties along Mumbai's famed waterfront, the open area for some of those behind the November slaughter.

At least 27 people were wounded by a grenade lobbed into a crowd of revelers at a park in General Santos in the Philippines. (See story on Page A3.)

Arabs scrap festivities

Elsewhere, several Arab states canceled planned celebrations as Palestinians in the Islamic run Gaza Strip suffered a sixth straight day of Israeli bombardment.

Egypt, Jordan, Dubai and Syria all called off festivities including concerts by renowned Arab singers, with Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum giving the order "as a sign of solidarity with the Israeli-Palestinian people."

In Malaysia, the government—mindful of the shaky economy—chose not to sponsor any celebration at all.

In Hong Kong, thousands thronged around Victoria Harbor for a midnight fireworks display, but those with investments linked to collapsed investment bank Lehman Brothers were finding little joy.

"I don't think there's any reason for me to celebrate after knowing that my investment is worth nothing now," said electrical repairman Chan Hon-ming, who had purchased a $38,000 Lehman-backed investment.

Evil spirits

At midnight in Japan, temples rang their bells 108 times—representing the 108 evils being struck out—as worshippers threw coins as offerings and prayed.

Taiwanese workers toiled on the tarmac in spite its fighting its recession, saying it "grieves my heart that many people have been left in difficult conditions."

Celebrations were muted in China, where feasting is reserved mainly for the Lunar New Year, which begins Jan. 26.

Other people tried to forget their troubles, for at least one night.

Sydney was the first major world city to [illegible] with 2009 officially locked in at 8:00pm GMT (8 p.m., Manila time).

Up to 1.5 million Australians and tourists converged on the city surrounding Sydney's world-famous Opera House for the city's biggest-ever fireworks display.

Bikinis and champagne

Most scarves gave way to bikinis in South America, where an estimated 2 million people squeezed onto Brazil's Copacabana beach to Rio de Janeiro despite rainy skies and ominous storm clouds.

Families from some poor neighborhoods descended onto the beach to celebrate alongside the wealthy, who unveiled bottles of champagne.

Across the Atlantic, revelers braved chilly weather in London to see the fireworks spectacular rising the River Thames, which engulfed the London Eye in a blaze of color.

In Paris, more than half a million people thronged on the famed Champs-Elysees avenue before the bells.

Some people paused for a deep breath and a sip of ... perhaps something cheaper than champagne.

"We're not going to celebrate in a big way. We're being careful," said architect Miriam Gilson as shoppers in the affluent area west of Paris were making back purchases for the New Year's Eve feast.

Kisses sold

In Ireland, thousands of Irishmen and tourists gathered outside the oldest medieval cathedral, Christ Church, to hear the traditional bell ringing.

"It is a wonderfully beautiful note on which to end what, for many people, has been an awfully out-of-tune 2008," said Gary Maguire, a volunteer pulling the ropes.

About 100,000 people gathered in Bratislava's main square to celebrate the midnight hour, becoming the 16th member of the eurozone. Two 18-year-old students were selling kisses for a euro each among the partying people sporting flashing headbands, hats and colorful wigs.

In Athens' Syntagma Square—scene of violent protests by Greek youths in the last month—the mood was upbeat, but in the northern city of Thessaloniki police set off tear gas on five anti-Golden Dawn protests, to police, who responded with tear gas.

In Venice, some 30,000 welcomed 2009 with a collective kiss.

In Iceland, where people have been angry over the country's collapsed economy, [illegible] Argyol a New Year's five broadcast forcing the prime minister off the air, storming the hotel where it was being filmed. They threw fireworks and some bulbous at police.

US parties canceled

In Times Square in New York City the wind chill made it feel like 3 degree (-17 Celsius) but that didn't deter the throngs who were chanted in fur hats and sleeping bags.

Former President Bill Clinton and Sen. Hillary Clinton, who will become President-elect Barack Obama's secretary of state, helped Mayor Michael Bloomberg lower the famous crystal ball atop a Times Square by the countdown at midnight.

On Wall Street, a modest rise in stocks helped traders raise a green-tinged glass despite the trauma of a catastrophic year rated as the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

The US economic troubles made many people less interested in giving 2008 an expensive send-off.

Public celebrations were canceled in communities from Louisville, Kentucky, to Reno, Nevada, and promoters in Miami Beach, Florida, reported slower ticket sales than expected for celebrity-studded parties.

Reports from AFP and AP

CANDLELIGHT VIGIL FOR GAZA Palestinian youths celebrate the New Year in the West Bank City of Ramallah by showing their solidarity with the people of Gaza as Israel's massive bombardment enters a new sixth day. AFP

HK people most pessimistic on '09–poll

HONG KONG—HONG KONG PEOPLE are more gloomy about the prospects for 2009 than anyone else in the world, while mainland Chinese are among the most optimistic, a worldwide survey released Thursday said.

Sixty-seven percent of the 1,052 people polled in Hong Kong by research firm TNS and Gallup International between October and December believed that 2009 would be worse than 2008—almost double the global figure of 35 percent.

Just 5 percent said Hong Kong would become more prosperous this year, although 61 percent of full-time and part-time employees are confident that their jobs are secure.

The survey interviewed 43,700 people in 46 countries and regions.

The downbeat mood in Hong Kong is in stark contrast to findings from a similar survey conducted by the same organization 11 months earlier, which ranked people in the Chinese territory as the most optimistic in Asia.

Iceland, too

The same level of pessimism was recorded in Iceland, one of the countries worst hit by the global financial crisis. The other pessimists included Singapore, Ireland, Greece and Croatia.

Thomas Isaac, director of research services for TNS Hong Kong and Singapore, said the latest findings reflected the dramatic views being expressed by many of the city's most respected business organizations.

These included a forecast that Hong Kong's unemployment rate would climb to 5 percent by the middle of 2009, he said.

"Just as the recession has had a swift and severe effect on the global business community, it has also flushed the optimism of local citizens equally quickly," he said.

By contrast, mainland China has the second highest level of optimism after Kenya, with 53 percent of those polled saying they looked forward to a brighter new year. Other optimists included Australia, Lebanon, Colombia and New Zealand. AFP

Don't focus ...

From page A1

"New Year's resolutions can sometimes focus on our problems or insecurities such as being overweight, feeling unhappy in our jobs or feeling guilty about not devoting enough time to friends and family throughout the year," said Mind chief executive Paul Farmer.

"We at charities ourselves for our perceived shortcomings and set unrealistic goals to change our behavior, so it's not surprising that when we fail to keep resolutions, we end up feeling worse than when we started.

"In 2009, instead of making a New Year's resolution, think positively about the year to come and what you can achieve."

Mind suggested resolutions-makers focus instead on being active, maintaining social links, learning something new and working for one's community. AFP

People's Choice
SUPER BRAND
PLATINUM 2007
GOLD 2006
GOLD 2005
PLATINUM 2004
GOLD 2003
GOLD 2002
GOLD 2001
GOLD 2000
GOLD 1999
GOLD
PILOT
Coleto
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OPINION

Ghastly Gaza

THE NEW ISRAELI OFFENSIVE IN THE GAZA STRIP poses a dilemma for citizens of democracies around the world. It is self-evident that Israel, a thriving if sometimes awed-overrun oasis of democracy in a desert of Middle Eastern despots, has the right to defend itself and to secure its borders. This is a right that other democracies must support, even at great political cost. But it is also growing ever clearer that Israel's armed action in Gaza is disproportionate and thus illegitimate and, for that reason, ultimately self-defeating.

EDITORIAL

Like the "shock and awe" doctrine that drove the United States under the second Bush administration to its disastrous and unnecessary war in Iraq, the "all-out war" (in Defense Minister and former Prime Minister Ehud Barak's description) that Israel has declared on the Hamas organization that dominates Palestinian politics in Gaza will not lead to greater security, but less.

It will deepen Palestinian grievance over Israel's heavy-handedness, and inflame admittedly considerable public opinion on the so-called Arab street. It may succeed in destroying vital Hamas "infrastructure" in the strip that allows the terrorist organization to launch hundreds of rockets into parts of Israel, but it will complicate the effort to strengthen the moderate forces in Palestinian politics. Not least, it will make future compromise with Israel equivalent, in the eyes of many suffering Palestinians, to capitulation.

We do not wish to gloss over the great difficulty that Israel confronts. Hamas, which won elections in 2006 at the expense of the traditional and now moderate Fatah, continues to refuse to recognize the existence of Israel or, indeed, its very right to exist. While we acknowledge the growing consensus that Israel's aggressive settlement policy in the West Bank is a serious complication, and may in fact be the main obstacle to the dream of permanent peace, and a two-state solution, Hamas' primordial refusal to recognize Israel is at the root of the problem, too.

That offers Israel with only a few choices, all of them hard. At the current public relations blitz has made clear (Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, to give only one instance, has given countless interviews since the new Gaza offensive started six days ago), Tel Aviv's governing coalition has framed the new upsurge of conflict as Israel's carefully considered plan to finally put an end to the Hamas rocket attacks. As news reports in Israel's free press have detailed it, Operation Cast Lead has eminently been a military success, from planning (under Barak, Israel's most decorated soldier) to execution (with the express approval of the three leaders of the coalition, Livni, Barak and outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert).

The conduct of the "all-out war" has been the complete opposite of the way Israel ran its keyhanded campaign during the Second Lebanon War in 2006, which helps explain the current high levels of public support inside Israel.

But the Israeli efficiency of the Israeli war machine has created a grave humanitarian crisis in the strip, routinely described in press reports as one of the world's most densely populated areas. Despite official rhetoric about military-only targets, as much as 25 percent of the 400-plus casualties in Gaza thus far has been "collateral damage"—that is to say, civilian casualties. On the other hand, Israeli casualties from rocket attacks number in the low single digits.

It is never easy to use the moral calculus of comparative deaths, but surely no one, not even an Israeli democrat sickened by the highest patriotism, can seriously suggest that the number of deaths in southern Israel is equivalent to the number of deaths inflicted in Gaza. Even if we were to limit the number to those of innocent civilians alone, the Israeli action is staggeringly disproportionate, about a hundred to one.

This is the kind of arithmetic that Palestinians, whether they voted for Hamas or Fatah, or whether they did not care enough to vote at all, will remember for a long time; they will memorize it, by rote, like a murderous multiplication table that does not seem to know, or perceive, an end.

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The fortune-tellers are pulling your leg

THIS IS THAT TIME OF THE YEAR WHEN ALL sorts of fortune-tellers, soothsayers, seers, mystics, feng shui experts, etc., come out of the woodwork and make all sorts of predictions. It is perhaps a sad commentary on the gullibility of Filipinos that we give importance to these frauds. Some Filipinos would rather believe these corn manglobale than their own eyes. Some go to great lengths to locate winning wealth or missing relatives. Although the psychics give clues and hope to their customers, peculiarly none of the missing wealth or relatives ever get to be found. The psychics always have an excuse for failing, either somebody in the room had stolen the items or his instructions were not followed.

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

Still, the Filipinos' faith in the manglobales is such that these operators make a good living selling fortunes. Go to the Quiapo church and you will see a long line of manglobales sitting on the sidewalk waiting for customers. At least one who calls herself Madame something has become famous by vainly trying to make her self look younger, concealing younger men, and running after a male seer. She still singes.

In my public statement, I lying had fallings: Those manglobales are pulling your leg. They are making fools of you. They cannot even tell the future from your neighbor can. They can do short-term your missing watches or jewelry chase or lost wallets or jewelry. The title to they don't know, never have and never will.

What they're expert in is psychology. They tell you what you want to hear but not completely. They string you along so that you will come back regularly, every week or every few days, to hear more. It is like selling a suspense novel...you come back to those more because of the suspense, because you want to know how it will end, and you hope it will end to your favor. Only it never does. It always ends in favor of the manglobale who has got your money.

To be fair, I want to add that the manglobales fulfill a function, even if in doing that they make fools of people. The manglobales arrange the hair and coordinates of their clients. The person who suspects his/her spouse of cheating goes to the manglobale to get confirmation or denial of the infidelity or get the identity of the third person. A spouse who has fatally problems goes to the manglobale for advice and hope.

I think that is the important function of the manglobales: to give desperate people hope. These desperate people would be lost without the comforting words of the manglobales. These words help troubled people get through difficult times, make them believe that better times are ahead. The manglobales can be compared to the priest or the pastor to whom troubled people go for comfort and advice.

Go comfort and hope but don't believe them book, line and sinker. I repeat, they tell you what you want to hear. If you are love-struck, they tell you that somebody is secretly in love with you and you need only happiness and pride even if that someone is just a figment of the imagination.

Why is it, you eagerly ask. And the manglobales gives you bits and pieces of clues which can apply to anybody. So that the next time you think somebody is sending glances at you, you begin to think that this is the person secretly in love with you.

If you are seeking the identity of the suspected paramour of your spouse, the manglobale gives you general and vague clues as to his/her description, occupation, etc., so that every time somebody glances at you or your spouse, you suspect that he/she is the paramour.

And the manglobales are giving you along for months and years. Each time it seems the "suspect" is near identification, he/she looks at the crystal bowl or cards and says: The picture is hazy. Maybe when you come back next time, it would be clearer. And you come back again and again, each time parting with your meager money together in the manglobales.

This manglobale syndrome reminds me of the lyrics of an old song, "The Gypsy" if you have forgotten them, here are the lyrics that tell why people keep going back to manglobales:

"In a quaint caravan there's a lady that will tell The Gypsy.

"She uses look into the future and do her away all your fears.

"Everything will come right if you only believe The Gypsy.

"She can tell at a glance that my life is so full of tears.

"She looked at my hands and told me, 'Your love is always true.'

"And yet in my heart I know dear, somebody else is fooling you.

"But I'll go there again 'cause I want to believe The Gypsy.

"That my lover is true and will come back to me again."

* * *

Letter-writer Stephen L. Manzano whose letter to yesterday's "Letters" column complained of the inequities with the nonstandard "unpaid leave" of public officials pointing out there's bit the bad over the head. They are stealing taxpayers' money in call attention to themselves, especially now that the 2010 elections are just around the corner. This is premature electioneering, which is against the law, he said.

MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando's imposition are all over not only Metro Manila but also the country he said. "In Quezon City, councilors are having a field day dipping their fingers into the city's coffers to expend for their own campaigns emblazoning their own stupid faces everywhere for the entire populace. If it's not Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, it's happy fiesta, happy graduation, happy valentines, happy birthdays, happy all souls' day. This is not happening in Quezon City alone. It is happening all over the country, with remarkable 100% brazenness, wrote Manzano.

I agree. There should be a law against this unscrupulous use of public funds.

Reinventing the Pinoy New Year's bash

FILIPINOS CELEBRATE THE NEW YEAR according to the Gregorian Calendar but with Chinese fireworks. It's typically Pinoy we mark the year ending in the 13th month, and there's no law just to play it safe we abide by ancient Chinese wisdom and frighten away evil spirits with firecrackers (and surround ourselves with round fruits, fill our pockets with money, leave our closet doors open, and generate ourselves before midnight, to name a few). And there's in some Western capitals, the major hazard of New Year revelry comes from drunk drivers, hereabouts what keeps hospital emergency wards busy are the victims of firecracker explosions and stray bullets.

PASSION FOR REASON

Raul C. Pangalangan

The casualty list for 2009 is mercifully low, thanks to the extra that presidentially extinguished the usual fusillade that paints the air. Apparently the government has also cut down the bullets use by police and soldiers of their guns—using bullets that taxpayers pay for—to make noise.

But apparently we are still unable to curtail the use of firecrackers despite their prohibitive cost and the active publicity campaign to discourage their use. Fortunately we are enduring times when the spirit's meaning of "cheer" is to welcome the new year, with the synergistic partnership between local governments and private businesses.

I went to watch the delightful midnight fireworks display, called the "Tagaytay Global Countdown and Sweet Duty" sponsored by the city government of Tagaytay and with the participation of restaurants at The Peak. I understand that in Makati, Mayor Jejo Binay organized a free concert, a fireworks show, and a million pesos raffle. Likewise, the hotel-rich area of nearby Ayala multi-participated, with support from the ADS-CSR Foundation's Sagip Kapamilya program. I have also read there is a similar celebration in the Manila Bay area, organized by the Mall of Asia.

In Boston, the First Night celebrations features street performers, jugglers, magicians, and acrobatic acts, and a whole range of ma-

ic—from organ concerts inside churches to Brazilian drums to open-air plazas, often featuring local artists (and giving them more exposure). Tickets are sold for access to some of the performances, while others are open to everyone. My family savored the First Night fun, drawn to the years-we quote-them. Since it will be difficult to replicate some of its features here, for one, outdoor ice sculpting is surely impossible in Manila's eternal heat—may sculpting the Lion King and in 30 minutes the only ice we will still be having enough for a fast fasting. But just as surely we have a rich panoramic of musical bands of all genres who, I suppose, will be happy to participate.

There are many lessons we can learn. One, Boston's First Night—30 years going this year—deliberately aims to take the focus on New celebration away from alcohol-related activities toward wholesome family outings. Similarly for Manila, we must be deliberate in our effort to discourage people from exploding firecrackers. Reason to have offices free subways rides to the public for the First Night activities—again, fully conscious that casualties on buses if people simply do not drive.

Two, it is not enough merely to ban firecrackers. We must offer practical alternatives that do not fight and mislead human trait. (The ban on firing guns, of course, is both imperative and legitimate, and should be enforced. Abroad, people are amazed when I tell them the most primitive way by which we celebrate that ban—by placing mocking tape to the gun muzzle and having a roaring silence instead (but caper.) Americans have learned their lesson with the Prohibition, the attempt to legislate the moral condemnation of alcohol that loomed even more morally contemptible thuggery. For too many years, fireworks are uniquely associated in Hong Kong and Singapore but there are two tightly spaced cities, and apparently we have more backwards and open spaces for the private use of fireworks. (If you lived in a high-rise condominium, I wonder where you will explode your Judas' Bell.)

Three, the big fireworks displays by the local governments and the business guests are the way to go. They satisfy the need for noise and carousing, but under the strict regulation by the (pyrotechnics) experts.

The downside to that this will denote the spontaneity for which Filipinos are renowned, and dampens the participative spirit (let us stress the Pinoy fiesta. I suppose the raffles and singing contests in the Makati celebration helped encourage the generosity of more wealthy and applauders. We should find more occasions for "audience participation" to take the place of the truly participative act of exploding one's own firecrackers, or to express it more metaphorically, to contribute one's own firecracker to the communal effort to drive away the demons).

But we must also accept the reality that times have changed. To have those loud explosions, we import our fireworks from China, and given the peso's decline, the cost of even a modest display is now at some P500,000 to 1.5 million. Here, those who can actually afford them merely ask their helpers to explode them in their behalf. The flip side is equally worrisome. Bulong-made fireworks, in contrast, are economically accessible but of erratic quality. Even when it comes to fireworks, Filipinos are bedeviled by the same problems: the cheap is not regulated, the accredited is too expensive, and the rich delegate even the help to the poor—and pains—of welcoming the future with a bang.

* * *

Comment to panalangan@gmail.com

Guinea coup

ANALYSIS

Armando Doronila

THE MILITARY COUP THAT SEIZED POWER following the death of President Lansana Conte of Guinea in West Africa on Dec. 22 was a classic textbook model of a swift and bloodless power grab seldom seen in the history of coup-prone Third World countries in Africa and Asia, including Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines.

It stood out in its broad daylight execution in a zone of sheer misery except in that the Guinea power structure was successfully staged by junior officers, not by entrenched generals. The successful junta overturned 23 years of one-man rule that made the Guinea military a client state led by an unknown captain, Moussa Dadis Camara.

The coup came in the midst of the global financial meltdown that dominated the news since the third quarter of 2008 and, indeed, stole the thunder from the more immediate catastrophe. It unraveled the globalized economic order that the door of coups are not over and military intervention in the lower echelons of military hierarchies can overturn the political scene in their own image of political change. The coup seemed out of place in the backdrop of the deleveraging seen on the economic scene.

The red-horned Captain Camara shocked the world by appearing on national TV announcing the dissolution of the government and suspension of the constitution. He declared that the days of President Conte, who ruled Guinea for 24 years and left a trail of corruption that impoverished the resource-rich country.

The swift and bloodless coup gave Third World countries' military academies food for a review of their defensive mechanisms and renewed the hope of junior officers that they could benefit from the success of Camara and his junta.

In the history of Philippine coups since 1986, coups started with conspiratorial cabals and ended in bloody confrontations. The coup attempts frustrated not with general staff officers like Chief of Staff Ver, Enrile's ally and the then-Chief of the Constabulary, Lt. Gen. Fidel Ramos. The Guinea coup would only have given heart to the cabal of Navy Lt. Antonio Trillanes, attacked the Oakwood Mutiny of 2003 following in the tradition of Colonel Honasan. A review of coups at the PMA archives would be in order for Trillanes and Tuliao's coup attempt failed. Camara's coup might offer some lessons, such as, that general staff officers are not always the backbone of successful coups. The Thai coups are not always good models.

They have been two general staff rank-and-file officers-initiated coups and both have failed.

The Camara junta announced its priorities after suspending the Constitution and dissolving the government, and pledged to step down in 2010 and hold elections after tackling corruption. After the Sanctions Committee of the Security Council first decision was to threaten 11 senior military officers, including the chief of staff, Gen. Ibrahima Diallo, and the chiefs of the army, navy and air force. The draconian rules effective immediately in the event of noncompliance with the Security Council of the regime under dictator Conte would be consigned to either jobs in the army. Tracks filled with soldiers were reported to have arrived outside the gate of General Diallo's house after the coup announcement. The soldiers searched his house, saying, "We are here to see what you have inside." The general was not home during the raid. In the energy, there was no violence reported.

"I know power is sweet," Camara told the press. "But look at the building, what do you see? Why are we here in the first place, when we could be in air-conditioned offices coming corrupt deals?" He said the new military leaders would execute any one who embezzled state funds and freeze the country's economic mining contract.

Camara, prior to the coup, was in charge of supplying army vehicles with fuel. Defending himself against these questioning his ability to lead the former French colony's 10 million people, he said: "My qualification is patriotism. You don't need to go to Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard University to run a country."

He moved to a nationalistic economics and studied public finance. My master's thesis was on the intervention of the International Monetary Fund in Africa, Latin America and Asia. So basically I am economist." The CNDD has named a cabinet to be headed by Ahmed Tidiane Souare, a former finance minister of Egypt-based African Export-Import Bank. Isaac Yehme, the coup was widely welcomed after 24 years of repressive rule by Conte.

Cellou Dalein, who was prime minister under Conte between December 2004 and April 2006, said: "There was no resistance because of a crisis of legitimacy surrounding the country's institutions and because of the misery" of the Guinean people. All interests were agreed that, according to Dalein, who became head of the opposition Union of Democratic Forces in Guinea in November 2007, "in 1995, only 40 percent of the population lived on less than a dollar a day."

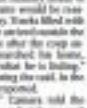
Guinea sits on one-third of the world's bauxite reserves, the ore mainted used to make aluminum. It also has extensive deposits of gold, diamonds and other minerals. Because of corruption and mismanagement, Guinea ranks 169 out of 177 in the United Nations' development scale.

The coup of the CNDD ranged the second without violence in Africa this year. The CNDD has not announced when it will give up its power to an elected government. It has quickly after appointing its members as defense and security ministers. Camara has pledged he would not seek election to the presidency.

All members military leaders who had seized power in the name of nationalist salvation and patriotism stayed in power longer than they had pledged. That their regimes have turned out less corrupt than those they replaced is not borne out by records.

Being 'green' in Quiapo

AT LARGE



Rina Jimenez-David

MOST WEEK'S QUIAPO FIRES IS SUSPECTED TO be either in another year's vacation and devotion to the Black Nazarene—especially since 2008 is widely predicted as a year of great challenges and difficulties.

But the EcoWaste Coalition, fearing a repeat of the massive littering that left tons of trash in Plaza Miranda and adjoining streets, urges that this year's celebration be "environment-friendly and green" event. "The unwarranted littering during the Quiapo fiesta is a disgrace to our age-old devotion to Poong Itim Hesus Nazareno as whose image of no come begging for relief and freedom from all troubles, including the threatening disasters that could have resulted from a polluted environment," Manny Calonzo, president of the EcoWaste Coalition, said.

Calonzo's group is working with the masses-led "Hijos del Señor Nazareno" (Sons of the Lord Nazarene) to show leadership in turning the nazarene's gathering into a less polluting event.

During last year's fiesta, the Coalition recalled, the Quiapo area was littered with over-the-top tonnes of single-use plastic beverage and "happy-for-to" banners cited choking the streets, which later ended up in trash.

"With the 2010 polls just around the corner, many politicians are likely to make their presence felt in the coming fiesta by adding their lot to the unsightly banner extravaganza," the EcoWaste Coalition lamented.

* * *

HERE are excerpts from a list of "green tips" the EcoWaste Coalition offers for the devotees and the merry-evenings at the Quiapo Fiesta:

1. Refrain from smoking, or better still quit for keeps. [to avoid] huff! Illicit and serious tobacco-related diseases that kill 5.4 million persons every year.

2. If you smoke, please don't toss butts on the ground. Cigarette filters are non-biodegradable.

3. If you chew gum, do put it in a bin after you've done with it. If there is no bin close by, put the spent chewing gum back into the wrapper and seal until you see a bin.

4. Please don't spit on walls, sidewalks and streets. Spitting is public pressure a serious health risk, especially to children who are more prone to disease-causing germs and bacteria.

5. Please do not urinate on the street. Urinating in public is unhygienic and poses social, health and environmental problems.

6. Give back to the residents used bamboo skewers for barbecue, grilled corn on the cob, boiled bananas, fishball and kikiam as devotees can accidentally step on dangerously thrown sticks and cause bodily injuries.

7. Put your discards into the designated bins. Quiapo (and the whole country for that matter) is not a dumpsite. Let us keep the shrine of the Black Nazarene, including the route of the procession, free of litter.

* * *

A COUNTRY'S immigration and deportation agency has long been regarded as the guardian of a nation's borders. The traditional view assigns it the task of preventing the entry of illegal immigration of foreigners, and of catching and deporting undesirable foreigners.

But a secondary role, although now increasing in importance, is the facilitation of the arrival and exit of foreigners who are welcomed to the country, especially foreign business people, investors and tourists who could help the country economically.

This role the Bureau of Immigration, under Commissioner Marcelino Libanan, has sought to expand. Lauded by the local and foreign business sector, the BI has sought to be proactive in liaising in foreign investors, long before the global recession became big news.

Under Libanan's watch, the Bureau launched the "One upon arrival program" (YOAP), granting foreign nationals visas upon their arrival if their trip is on legitimate business, be it "tourism, organization or associations based in the Philippines, such as a foreign chamber, a foreign federation, an association of businessmen, and a visit to non-governmental organizations."

Rizal Commissioner of the YOAC the BI has also seen a dramatic increase in arrivals of tourists as well as potential investors.

Another innovation of the BI is the recently instituted Special Visa for Employment Generation (SVEG), under which foreign investors will be issued a visa granting them an indefinite stay as long as they employ at least 10 Filipinos in legitimate and sustainable businesses in the country.

Foreign business leaders say the SVEC could encourage more than 1,000 SVEG-IP's in the first year, which is not unbelieved given the reported increase in business persons conversing to the Philippines.

* * *

MORE FROM the innovations he has introduced as immigration commissioner, Libanan has also gained recognition as a guitarist of note. I recently received a CD showcasing his guitar playing, and he has since become a favorite entertainer at company events.

From such favorites as: "The Prayer" to contemporary numbers like "Looking through the Eyes of Love," the CD provides smooth, soothing music, the crowning glory of which is Libanan's wonderful guitar playing, complemented by saxophone, violin and cello.

I remember my first exposure to Libanan's guitar playing at a benefit concert for media friends, which he spearheaded not just for the quality of his playing but also by the passion with which he approached his art. Perhaps these lies the secret of both his gift as an artist and his accomplishments as a lawyer and now as immigration commissioner. Whatever he did for Bobby Ortega, Libanan brings innovation and daring, confidence and courage. Not a bad formula for someone who does break the common conception of what a bureaucrat should be, and what the bureau should accomplish.

I am Filipino

COMMENTARY

Alexander L. Lacson

I am Filipino. My Creator planted me on a speck of land on earth, where the sun always shines, in an archipelago of 7,107 wonderful islands, which the whole world calls the "Pearl of the Orient Sea." Fittingly, this is the country God gave to me and the people. It is the birthplace of my race. It is the home of the Filipinos.

The beauty and richness of my country have made it the treasure of the world. It is the envy of many. So today, my blood is a mixture of the best and the finest of the East and the West. My mind is an open to all the great thoughts of the West, and the great to the best of the East. My heart beats with Love for God, country, family and fellowmen.

I am Jose Rizal, Andres Bonifacio, Juan Luna, Nonoy Aquino and all those who fought for our land to become a nation of free people. I am the grandson of Rizzal, the great-nephew of Bonifacio, the great-cousin of the many heroes of my Motherland. They, and the depth and breadth of Philippine Soul.

I am Filipino. My Creator's plan is for me to live my life as a Filipino and therefore, in my heart and in my mind, I shall always be a Filipino wherever I may be in the world. My Creator's plan is for me to be a Filipino family and as such, I am a kapatid to anyone and everyone who is Filipino, wherever he or she may be on earth.

This will know me by the word "po" in my sentences. This will know my children by their "Nanay po." They will know me by the smile on my face and the warmth of my hospitality. Most important of all, you will know me by my loving and caring heart which you are in need of help, even if you are a stranger.

As a child of God, my Creator has a beautiful task for me and my people. And the story we are writing in but a daring portion of that beautiful story that Lacson is fully unfold before the eyes of the world.

I am Filipino. I am who I am today because of the role God wants me to play.

I am born to succeed. God has equipped me, within me and around me, with all the resources I need to succeed in the role He has given me. Regardless, the color and race of the people in the world, I am confident that I can be successful.

I am destined to be great. God planted seeds of beauty and greatness in me. He truly wants me to be great and beautiful, for my people want me to add more beauty and greatness to our world.

I am Filipino. I am born of freedom, in a free country. As such, I shall not struggle in ensuring that my people and country shall always remain free. I am born to be free, to help other peoples, in my country or in other parts of the world, gain their own freedom.

I am born of love, one of God's immeasurable love, in a couple's zeal to a world that not only is worth loving but is also in need of love. I am born to love this world, as love shall be who I am.

I am born as part of the whole, as part of the entirety of God's creation. I am born to share in the problem, as part of the hope to our people. I am born to help the Filipino become great not only in the eyes of the world but, more so, in the eyes of our Lord.

I am Filipino. I am a faithful child of God. I shall do my life to be God's work on earth, to help build a beautiful country for my Filipino family, and a better world for all humanity. And soon the world shall see the full measure of the greatness of Fil-Am. Then, I shall be able to say with all my heart: I am God's and to the world, but, more so, I am Filipino.

* * *

Alexander Lacson is author of the book "12 Little Things Every Filipino Can Do To Help Our Country." Email: alacson@yahoo.com

Old and new

FUNNY HOW PEOPLE CELEBRATE THE NEW WITH THE OLD. I was supervised by the mad exodus of people back to one's hometowns, or family home (called tao ho, meaning old home in Chinese) to spend the new year. I had so much back too this year, battling crowds in airports, but since I landed back here on the night of the 30th, even if the trip every was only a few days, I had a greater sense of euphoria and of wanting to hug people.

The new is always exciting, but we also need the old to anchor us. The Greek philosopher Protoclitus was wrong that nothing is constant except change, but I have a slightly different take on that: change would be unbearable, without some sense of constancy.

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

This new year's morning, I heard, and found comfort, in an old clock chiming at 6 o'clock, accompanied with church bells. I also felt more intimate connecting to get up soon and check on the young and the old people and pets, but more on the latter given the night's fireworks. Fortunately though, one of the cats preempted me, calling out at my bedroom door and demanding to be let in for its morning routine drink and a bit of ear play with my two favorite people and pets began entertaining in and out of the room.

I thought, longer to dwell, as many constant companions. I like that pulse but grudges me that just makes me to refer to someone who just is constantly over with, but who society can't accept just yet. It's nonsense, for example, you can't marry for any number of reasons but who you've been with for years and years.

Nothing holds us, legally at least, in a constant companion, as such relationships are sustained by pure ice impose, as gossips would have it) commitment. "You're like an old dog," I told mine the other day. With constant companions, you know right away if someone like that are meant to be placed beside in the dominant compliment. Just to be even ending, I rubbed him behind his ears like I used to do with Tiny.

Tiny got her name because she's a dachshund, and was the runt in her litter. Last year, she went off to doggie heaven, or wherever. She was 14, which is nearly a hundred human years. I found myself missing her this New Year's morning, as my wife and I were about to head to the airport for the end of the break, and the cats, my cats—only 4 but had seen enough of Tiny to sometimes pine the law. So, occasionally, to claim its use by running in the garden.

Constancy doesn't mean clinging on to past glories and accomplishments. Hotels and resorts are there to allow us to enjoy the fruits of our labors, but not to be a substitute for the challenges—and 2009 will be a formidable one—the greater the need to gird ourselves with those little traditions. The United States will be getting a new president, who just might lead the world through a serious crisis into a new historical era. He took this victory on the slogan, "Change we can believe in." It is inevitable that we will see a lot of change into office on the same Bible Abraham Lincoln used more than a hundred years ago.

Old Bibles provides the constancy, the faith, to ride the waves of change.

Anniversaries

I warned that first part to be short, and to the point, and not the rest of my column space to run through some historical anniversaries for 2009. Consider this an appetizer since I will be writing about some of these events, and historical figures, during the year.

The sciences have some big anniversaries coming up. This time the world will look up to the skies in celebration of World Astronomy Year 2009, marking Galileo's having improved on the telescope and whose celestial discoveries, late in 1609 and into 1610, led him to declare his support for Copernicus, another astronomer who lived more than a hundred years earlier and had dared suggest that Earth revolved around the sun. That idea got Copernicus, and Galileo, into trouble with the Church, which held to the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic view of the universe, insisting the universe revolved around our planet and its humans. Galileo was put on trial by papal authorities and was found "vehemently suspect of heresy." In 1992, after almost 400 years, Pope John Paul II expressed regret for that incident. Oh well, better late than never.

Also coming up is Charles Darwin's 200th birth anniversary, as well as the 150th anniversary of his book, "The Origin of Species," which describes his theory of natural selection and unleashed controversies about human evolution that continue to rage today, the opposition again coming from modern-day creationists.

The year 2009 will have several political anniversaries. Saturday, Jan. 1, was the 50th anniversary of the Cuban revolution. The small island still captures the imagination of many people in the world because it has dared to defy its giant neighbor, the United States, and despite many obstacles, has one of the best health systems in the world.

April 30 marks the 200th anniversary of the sailors in Smyrna's Tanzimmen, with its mostly young participants demonstrating for more political freedom. The Chinese government sent in the tanks to crush them on the rubbers and it's still anyone's guess what happened to them.

This same year, on Nov. 9, the Berlin Wall came down and eventually led to the reunification of Germany. It also marked the end of the communist era in Eastern Europe.

All these anniversaries make it timely to devote some second capitalism, socialism, democracy.

Let's close in June with the world's biggest party: 100 in September but expect many activities earlier in the year, including, in March, when a conference sponsored by EP Magsaysay will be held. I've agreed to present a paper on the ghosts of that hauntingly beautiful city.

The Independence Day (June 12) will also celebrate its centennial in the Philippines. Three less priests arrived in Manila in August 1909 and went on straight to Baguio. Also is set up their first mission.

Toward the end of the year, on Dec. 16, we will be celebrating the sesquicentennial, 150 years, of the Iloilo Jaro mass. Iloilo, which was one of the important bastions of Iloilo since in 1767, the Jesuits had been expelled from the Philippines but were able to return in 1859 and, since then, seem to have been making up for nearly a hundred lost years.

The year 2009 promises new ways of looking at the old, and old ways of interpreting the new.

* * *

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Value of Rizal's death vs birth

AS A KNIGHT OF RIZAL, I AM not in favor of moving Rizal Day from Dec. 30 to June 19, as proposed by some historians.

It is customary especially for parents to celebrate and remember the birth of a person with jubilance. However, for a great man like Jose Rizal, whose life and martyrdom made a very significant impact on our nation and the Filipino people, I believe that it is only fitting and proper to remember and give him special honor on the day of his death, which is Dec. 30. This is also to ease watch our other heroes like Andres Bonifacio, Apolinario Mabini, Gregorio del Pilar, Jose Abad Santos, Gomburza and Hilario Aguinio.

We celebrate Christmas with a lot more merriment than any other holidays. But as Christians, we should give more importance to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

—ELPIDIO S. SIO-SIAN IV, M.D.F.
chapter commander,
Knights of Rizal, PGH

The inspiring glow from a dedicated public servant

AS AN AUTHORIZED AGENT OF the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office online lottery, submitting weekly sales reports is one of my routine duties. I must say I am a regular visitor to the PCSO complex and I have personally seen PCSO directors and employees arriving to report for work. What struck me last Dec. 16 was the sight of PCSO director Manuel Morato arriving in a wheelchair, with his left leg in cast.

A security staff told me that he had undergone surgery after an accident. Instead of taking a complete rest and despite his present physical condition, he chose to report to the office thinking perhaps that chance cannot be delayed. Here is a man whose passion in helping the less fortunate is so deep that I find it difficult to fathom. Morato is truly an example for people in government. There is saying, "Not everybody can be famous but everyone has a chance to be great, for greatness is determined by service." I find this so true in Morato.

The PCSO, an agency under the Office of the President, helps the poorest of the poor without failure. Still, it gets a lot of flak from people who have not done anything for the poor. On judgment day, as we all must do sooner or later, I suppose the angels guarding heaven's gate will ask only one question: "What have you done for the poor?"

In the midst of discontent where we are honorable gentlemen stomping on one another with ice language in their strides against this administration, it makes us wonder where our country is going. Really I wouldn't be surprised if one day these men would be throwing shoes at one another.

Whoever conceived the word "tropa" deserves to get a medal. From the "tropa" trapo" who has fallen from his perch, to borrow a phrase from Sen. Ameurfina Herrer, to the presidential aspirants who will never pass up the chance for a photo op—be it a rally or a calamity like a typhoon or fire, the Philippines has an abundance of their down to the barangay level. Pray tell, what have these tropas done to uplift the living conditions of the less fortunate, whose daily existence is a struggle in itself amid grinding poverty? In the average man on the street, the future may not be so bright with what he sees on TV and reads in the newspapers. To others, perhaps it would be useless to talk of restoring their faith in the government.

I say, all is not lost. Hope springs eternal with the dawning of every new day. However dark the world may seem, there will always be a faint glimmer of hope around us. For like the scattered and flickering lamps of falimanan at sea in the early dawn of a mysterious sky, there is an inspiring and warm glow that shines from a dedicated public servant, and that glow could inspire others to kindle their own light to make our overpowering glow that could make us all proud to be Filipinos.

—ROMULO O. PEÑA,
2241 S. Del Pan St.,
Sta. Ana, Manila

Evangelista's column crass and unbefitting the Inquirer

PRAISE TO THE DEC. 29 COLumn "C. Epol" of Patricia Evangelista. Rapists and pedophiles may now run around that what they do is merely living out their healthy sexual lifestyle.

Evangelista's article even if it was just a review of a documentary, was written so crassly that it would have belittled more the serious of a cheap tabloid rather than of a broadsheet.

On the one hand, I am wondering why the Inquirer ever saw fit to have an article like that published. But, then, it seems that the paper is heading south when it comes to anything that has to do with christian teaching.

It might not mean much but this is one broadsheet that will no longer be seen in my home or office. I hope the Inquirer practices better editorial control as some of us the daily encourage our teenage daughters to read the papers. See anymore, at least not this paper.

—EDUARDO B. BOSCAS,
secretary
Bellarmine Filial Foundation,
r_boscas@yahoo.com

Combat principle of kill or be killed

I AGREE WITH ERNEST PHEL dery that Hans Tuttle law enforcers should follow the "principle of necessity" in shooting people with guns in crowded places like the gunmen would shoot at them. (In actions, 12/6/08) This reminds me of an incident when I was enrolled in Basic ROTC and found myself engaging with senior cadets on the field. My final a soldier should "never live as the enemy unless dead upon." In the actual shooting was the prevailing theory is "to kill or get killed." This theory is also attributed on the principle of kill or be killed.

Our discussion was stopped by the training officer who had many experiences in combat operations against the defunct Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan. He told the senior cadets that I was right. In the war front, the combatant no longer thinks about the theory of "not to live unless dead upon." He applies only the theory of "kill or get killed."

—GEORGE BOY G. PITEA,
post commander
Veteran Federation
of the Philippines
East South Emilia Veterans Post,
Canaman Norte
Veterans District, Daet

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Writers of letters to the editor are requested to include their complete address and telephone or pager number or e-mail address for verification purposes. The Inquirer will not publish any letter unless such information is supplied.

Undue advantage in delayed justice

IT'S BEEN TWO TERMS SINCE the last elections, and another round of elections will be held over a year from now. But the Commission on Elections has yet to come up with a definitive decision on the election protest case regarding the mayoralty contest in Bacoor, Cavite. The case involves a very simple question of law and law—specifically, the appreciation of votes cast in favor of a disqualified runner-up candidate who was obviously put up to "create opportunities" to invalidate the "unanimous" votes of a strong candidate.

Since the issue is so simple to understand and whenever decision the Comelec will adopt will not unduly be elevated to higher courts, the poll body would do well to render a decision on the case now.

The protagonists in the case are, incumbent Mayor Edwin "Strike" Revilla Tolosa family includes Sen. Ramon Revilla Jr. and is very close to whoever is the president of the Philippines; the other party is Sotero Mabini, three-termer vice-mayor and three-termer councilor of Bacoor, who has no influence and power except that coming from the people.

Justice delayed is justice denied. Save this delay is providing undue advantage to the incumbent whose tenure of office is under a cloud of suspicion.

—GEORGE O. M. RIVAL
114-B Alima, Bacoor, Cavite

Worst plague Filipinos are cursed with

THE EDITORIAL TITLED "EDUcation," Dec. 12/14/08) is an excellent piece of literature which should be widely read and appreciated, not only for grammar but also for education.

We agree with the opinion that Sen. Mar Roxas' explosive simply expressed an "emotion which goes veiled from it when other reality is not possible."

That loyal toady of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Press Secretary Ana Marie Banzon, whose first name should have been Judas instead of Jesus, glossed it what he wanted to impress on us that the senator's words were so base, and that the latter "stooped so low in the mud."

We hasten to say that Senator Roxas' "emotion" was not base enough to descend to the level of Banzon, his patrons and all those who have been the cause of all these tollers. Senator Roxas simply had the courage to say publicly what most of us must have been saying privately.

In normal Darwin—if we may paraphrase 19th-century English savant Daniel below here—of all plagues with which our people are cursed, he and his patrons' system is the worst.

We need herculean efforts to kill this fiend in the manner befitting a vassal to the ultimate Hippocratic methods of removing it from our lives.

Hippocrates, the Greek physician who is considered as the Father of Medicine, said that, "For extreme diseases, extreme measures of treatment is most efficacious. Prayer indeed is good," he continued, "but while calling on the gods a man should himself lend a hand."

The lawyers are the foremost diseases our country is infected with. We hope that among us Filipinos, there is or are Hercules/es who would have enough courage to fight and defeat the modern monsters that plague us.

—EDISON MENDOZA
Lolli Bayuga@aol.com

PDEA needs all-out support from us

THIS IS IN REACTION TO THE news story "PDEA ready to roll all," (Inquirer, 1/1/09) There are very few officers like Reg. Inciong Barcelona. With his conviction of the hebetes, he needs all the support from all of us, especially from the media.

There is indeed a need to investigate this case and unveil to the Filipino people who are these corrupt and dirty officials of the justice department. I know most of them are from the top to the bottom.

—JOSEN M. IAGOE
dilcon@yahoo.com

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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Across the NATION

Baguio centennial countdown is on

BAGUIO CITY—THE REST OF THE WORLD counted down to 2009 on Wednesday midnight but Baguio's 300,000 residents spent their New Year's Eve reverently by marking down the hours to the summer capital's centennial year.

Simultaneous fireworks displays—from the Baguio Country Club to the Session Complex of Camp John Hay and the Baguio Country Club—signaled the start of Baguio's 100th-year celebrations.

Baguio City was chartered in May 1909, after former American Governor-General William Cameron Forbes executed the initial designs for a close-knit city of 30,000 residents that were rendered by Chicago architect Daniel Hudson Burnham.

The American colonial governor had commissioned Burnham to plan for a cosmopolitan hill station or resort-like mountain camp (the cool counterpart of Camp John Hay and the Baguio Country Club—signaled the start of Baguio's 100th-year celebrations.

Baguio City was chartered in May 1909, after former American Governor-General William Cameron Forbes executed the initial designs for a close-knit city of 30,000 residents that were rendered by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham.

The American colonial governor had commissioned Burnham to plan for a cosmopolitan hill station or resort-like mountain camp (the cool counterpart of Benguet that would serve as the officials' refuge from the heat in the lowlands).

Burnham only had nine days to survey the prospective Benguet settlement before returning down to draw how Baguio was to be shaped, according to author Robert Reed's "City of Pines," the definitive book on Baguio's origins.

In the next hours of Jan. 1, church leaders said a civic organization also revived the City Beautiful Movement, which was launched in the first quarter of the 20th century by the man who designed Baguio City.

This was a movement of academic scholars that followed in Burnham's urban architectures, which managed the growth of modern cities by blending function with beautification.

Benedicto Alhambra, city tourism officer, and members of the Baguio Community of Volunteers Movement (BCVM), relaunched the movement, hoping to draw public support for a major conservation, restoration and cleanup drive of the century-old city on the first day of 2009.

Catholic priest Carmelo Carreon, BCVM secretary general, said they broke up the Centennial year into a 125-day period of advocacy called "jubilaryo" (proclamation), a 100-day period of conservation drive called "maraling" (celebration), and a 145-day period of celebration called "pinasidian."

They introduced flowers as the all-assorted crossover pine tree on upper Session Road, which they planned to convert into a giant floral landscape.

President Macapagal Arroyo marked the start of the celebration by giving gifts to some 3,000 indigents at the Mountain, the official presidential residence in the city.

Ms Arroyo handed out blanket-and-food packages to poor Ibaloi-Igorot residents identified by the Department of Social Welfare and Development as well as selected beneficiaries from La Trinidad, Benguet, and those living near the Mansion.

It was a security nightmare for the Presidential Security Group (PSG), which had to link people who entered the mansion before they were led to area offering free medical services. Nonoi Gabieza, Inquirer Northern Luzon

Gun crimes grip CamSur, Naga City near New Year

NAGA CITY—A SERIES OF GUN crimes killed five persons, including a village chief, and injured another in two towns in Camarines Sur and this city days before New Year's Eve, reports from the Naga City Police Office and Philippine National Police (PNP) Wednesday.

In Almadrones town, Barangay Tabas chief Leonardo C. Peralta, 53, died after he was shot by a suspected member of the New People's Army on Dec. 29.

The murderer angle is being explored as probable motive for the killing.

In Pili town, municipal government employee Joseph Hilos and Jerry Blanes were shot dead Monday night inside a restaurant in Barangay Old San Roque.

Jerry Manes, Jerry's brother, was also shot dead.

Investigators said the gunmen were in the same restaurant on a drinking binge.

Police said the gunmen most probably put on a banner in the restaurant's toilet then shot the victims and walked casually away.

Mayor Alfredo Jaro Lim said the motive for the killings were not yet clear.

Sen Lim immediately called for a dialogue between the town police and the municipal council to discuss the rising number of crimes in the town involving municipal employees.

In November, two municipal government employees also died after the vehicle they were riding in was shot by a suspect who remained unidentified until now.

Jacqui D. Subalbero died at the Bicol Medical Center in Naga on Tuesday of wounds he sustained from gunshots in another shooting.

Subalbero, along with Corinquian Reyes Tayabas, 56, shuttled with a group of police officers that led to Subalbero's shooting.

The officers from the 5th Regional Mobile Group were identified as PO2 Jerwin Jay Balbuena, PO1 Rod Espinosa and PO1 Roberto Illo. Jonas Cabilles Fabios, Inquirer Southern Luzon

BAY WATCH
Three fishermen in Caramoan, Camarines Sur check out their fishing vessel's outboard motor before heading out to the open waters of San Miguel Bay, where they must compete with trawlers and other illegal fishermen. JOAN CAMILLE SOLIS/INQUIRER CENTRAL LUZON

Celebration of New Year is Jan. 6 for Muslims

COTABATO CITY—MUSLIMS will celebrate the Islamic New Year on the 10th of Muharram, which corresponds to Jan. 6, 2009 in the Gregorian calendar.

President Macapagal-Arroyo on Tuesday urged the country's Muslims to help her government build peace in Mindanao, when she greeted them happy Islamic Hijrah (New Year) on the first day of Muharram.

"Islamic Hijrah, being the first day of the year, gives Muslims the opportunity to look forward to a better future and to live in peace and prosperity," said Ms Arroyo's statement quoted by Ali Sangki, Muslim affairs undersecretary.

"On this auspicious day, I ask our brother Muslims to support our resolve in taming the fragile peace in Muslim Mindanao into a genuine and lasting one. Mindanao is one, our countryside of whatever faith and culture should unite in our continuing search for peace and stability in Mindanao."

Muslims across the world differed on whether or not Asian Jadid should be celebrated.

Other beliefs

Some believe that celebrating on the first day corrupts Muslim tradition.

Rhidd Alexandra, a ranking member of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), said celebrating on the first day of Muharram appointed like an "invention" of the Western administration to appease the Moro people at the height of the armed conflict in the 1970s.

Rhidd, who took up the Sharia concept's review committee under the term Nomen Jadid," officially appears in the Codification of Muslim Personal Laws under Muslim Presidential Decree 1083.

The law also listed other Philippine Muslim holidays.

Mohammad Jamil Gunsaru, who travelled a lot as a student of Islam, said Amen Jadid was quite unfamiliar to overseas Filipino workers even in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the world's Islamic capital.

But while some Muslims agree on the 10th of Muharram as a day of celebration, Ismail Abdul Muslim disagree on how it would be observed.

Scholar's views

According to Ustazde Ejan Ismail, a Sunni scholar and former dean of the University of the Philippines' Institute of Islamic Studies, "the 10th of Muharram is traditionally observed as the beginning of the Muslim New Year," being God's Day of Salvation. It was during this time, he said, that Ishkind Noah's Ark Joseph and Moses were spared from heavenly wrath.

Some Muslims, who denounce Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Middle East, mark the day with prayers.

For the Shiites, who descend from the Persian areas of Iraq, Lebanon and Syria, the 10th of Muharram is a day of penitence or "Ashura." Hadi H. Mendoza, Inquirer Mindanao

For first time, Leyte town holds Rizal rites

By Jaqy R. Galvista
Inquirer Visayas

TACLOBAN CITY—FOR THE first time, the people and officials of the town of Jaro, Leyte commemorated the death of national hero Dr. Jose Rizal.

Jaro did not only commemorate Rizal's 112th death anniversary but it also gave a facelift and new site for the town's five-hectare plaza. Jaro is a fourth class municipality 45 kilometers from Tacloban City.

Mayor Rolando Cebrian said the town, for some unknown reasons, has never marked Rizal's death anniversary.

In his speech during the town's first-ever Rizal Day rites held at the municipal hall grounds, Cebrian expressed disappointment over the lack of interest from previous town officials in remembering Rizal's death.

The town appointed Rizal's monument in bronze and remembered it to the component of the two-storey municipal hall from the grounds of an abandoned and old American-era school building that was about 50 meters from the town hall.

Cebrian, a first-term mayor, said the previous location of Rizal's monument was "obscure and out of the way" which gave an impression that the town disregarded Rizal's standing as the country's "number one hero."

"[This is] where we realized it here properly belongs, and not in an obscure and out-of-the-way place," he said, adding that other municipalities could use Rizal's stance where they could honor him.

Cebrian also said that the new place for Rizal's statue would also serve as the town's new landmark.

During the celebration, a second-year high school student, Ryan Starbar, dressed like the national hero, delivered the piece "My Last Farewell" of Rizal.

Selected students from the Gonzaga-Baliwasan National High School also presented a reenactment of Rizal's execution at the Bagumbayan, now called the Rizal Park.

In Cebu City, acting Mayor Michael Rama urged city officials to follow the lead of Rizal.

Speaking at a wreath-laying ceremony Rizal's monument in the old city hall building in Cebu City Tuesday, Rama said public service must prevail instead of personal interest even as he reminded government officials that they were there to serve the public and not to accumulate wealth.

Whale buried in gov't fish cemetery in Pangasinan

By Yolanda Seriola
Inquirer Northern Luzon

DAGUPAN CITY—IT WAS A SAD ending for 2008 for fishery officials and conservationists, who had to bury an almost 11-meter long whale in the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources' fish cemetery here on Wednesday.

About 100 people who attended the burial were scared by the sheer size of the whale, which had been sawed into several body chunks.

Lament

The whale measured 9.5 meters long and weighed more 2.5 to 3 tons. It was named Rosanna by reporters and BFAR personnel in honor of 2008 as the Year of the Ox in the Chinese calendar.

THE SPECIES of the whale that was found Dec. 29 floating on Manila Bay had not been determined, but fishery officials said it was the first time they saw such kind of whale in the country. The whale, named Rosanna, was buried as a government-run fish cemetery in Pangasinan. CONTRIBUTED

Those who witnessed the burial could not help but lament the demise of another specie not mentioned as they watched its parts being brought down, chunk by chunk, by a big boom truck into its grave.

It took almost three hours to bury the whale at a corner of the 1,000-square meter fish cemetery. It was the 13th one excavated and the biggest to be so far buried there.

Dr. Wendy Rosario, BFAR Center chief, said the sea mammal's species has not yet been determined although it has features of either the Minke whale (Balaenoptera acutorostrata) or the Bryde's whale (Balaenoptera edeni).

DNA tests needed

"It is only through DNA tests by which we can determine the species," he said, adding that it was the first time that such kind of whale was seen in the country.

The whale was found floating on Manila Bay near the bow of a liquid ferry at South Harbor's Pier 13 on Dec. 29.

Rosario said the whale could have been dragged by a ship to the harbor. Based on its carcass, the whale could have drowned, he said.

"Sea mammals need to breathe. When part time is consistent with preservative solution, their lung tissue shrinks, or this whale ... must probably drowned," he said.

Lung tissue should float if the mammal did not drown, he added. Whales breathe through their nostrils called blow holes, and their lungs.

The necropsy also showed that the whale's stomach was empty and there was not a piece of plastic found there. Whales and dolphins usually die after accidentally swallowing plastics.

'Midnight': I only offered my services, not money

From page A1

of Boracay, packs of marijuana and several sachets of cocaine.

Joseph, 21, Richard Enrico Brodett, 23, and Joseph Randren Tronco, 23, were arrested four hours apart in Araneta Center in Quezon City and Ayala Alabang, Muntinlupa.

Master chef

Midnight, now a general manager and master chef at Hotel Vito in Pasay, admitted he offered something to the PDEA—not money but his services as a media practitioner.

"When my son was arrested, I went to see Director Nestor[Aland] Hinoveles in his office in the PDEA at 7 in the morning. We were there. I offered to help in the campaign against illegal drugs through my program. I have a two-hour program on DZRH. That was the only thing I offered. Not money. Not!" he said.

Hinoveles, head of PDEA Special Enforcement Service, led the operations that resulted in the arrest of the two and the "Midnight" tape.

Hinoveles earlier told the Inquirer about three attempts to bribe him and his men, beginning on the very day the arrests were made.

Aside from PSBM

He said the offer to "buy" him and his men came from an ordinary relased to Tronco.

The first offer was P3 million and the final offer rose to P20 million, according to the Special Enforcement Service chief.

The offers were different from the P50 million that was allegedly paid in exchange for a Department of Justice resolution dismissing the charges against Joseph, Brodett and Tronco, according to the PDEA.

Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño has denied that he and the prosecutors who investigated and reviewed the case had been bribed into recommending the dismissal of charges.

The suspects are still under PDEA custody because murder has no drug cases are automatically reviewed.

Suspects were victims

Midnight said he asked Maravillosa why the kids had been fired at. "Was there a chase-to-kill order?" he said.

Midnight lamented that in the fight against illegal drugs, the three young men were the victims. "Only those (the chief) Pilly are (they being targeted)? Who is financing the drug trade?" he said.

Midnight was in the middle of opening up when his lawyer arrived and admonished him for talking about his son's case, reportedly the alleged bribe attempts.

The lawyer gave his name but made it clear that he was not allowing it to be printed in the business. At the height of the election campaign in 2004, he filed a disqualification case against actor Fernando Poe Jr. who ran for president.

"The situation is getting complicated and as his lawyer I am advising him to stop this interview right now. Mr. Johnny, Midnight is not the one involved in this issue and even if he was is included in the issue, it would be best for him not to talk at this point," the lawyer said.

He said the media were not the proper forum to discuss the case.

Midnight was apologetic, saying that he understood the job of a reporter being a media practitioner himself. He surrendered followed the advice of his lawyer.

JOHNNY "MIDNIGHT" JOSEPH, fronting hosting "terno" to master chef and manager at Hotel Vito in Pasay City.

Alba's restaurant

Instead of the alleged bribery, Midnight talked about something else, how a media icon like him ended up as a chef.

"It was right after martial law was declared (on) October in condo. But I had to start at the bottom, as a kitchen helper; a waiter, then later a manager under the ruling of Don Anastacio de Alba of the famous Alba's restaurant," he said.

While he talked about something else, Midnight could not hide the fact that he was worried about his son, and would insert lines referring to his son's predicament.

At one point, he said he found it doubly hard to sleep since September, thinking about how his son Jorge was coping inside the detention cell of the PDEA in Quezon City.

But his lawyer was quick to alert Midnight that he was beginning to talk about his son's case again.

Copy of resolution

To keep Midnight away from the topic about his son's case, the lawyer thought of something else. The lawyer asked whether anyone in media had actually read the DOJ resolution which was the subject of a P50-million bribe.

"I have a copy!" Midnight volunteered. He left the dining area of Hotel Vito to get his copy of the DOJ resolution for this reporter.

While Midnight was getting the resolution from his car, the lawyer said the resolution would show that there was no bribery attempt.

The lawyer pointed out that almost all of the officers and men of the PDEA who were involved in the arrest of the three suspects were from the military.

"PDEA people think they are still in Mindanao, fighting the Abu Sayyaf. They don't know the procedure," he said.

Warrantless arrests, searches

The resolution dismissed the case because of the illegal warrantless arrest—and subsequent searches on the vehicles of the three suspects.

It was signed by State Prosecutor John Resado, with the recommending approval of Senior State Prosecutor Philip I. Kimpo. Zuño approved the resolution.

The resolution also noted the existence not of force against the suspects, pointing to several grave improprieties of the PDEA agents such as the sending of fraudster while his hand were tied and the shooting of the fight from the back of a Honda scooter. It also pointed to seven other bullet holes.

Without counsel

In their sworn statements, the respondents complained to the DOJ that one of the PDEA agents told that if the operation happened outside the push substitution in Alabang, they would not be alive.

"Kung sa labas ito nangyari at walang witness, tapik na sila (If it happened outside [the subdivision], and there were no witnesses, they would have been dead)," the PDEA agent was quoted as saying.

The resolution particularly noted that Joseph was "under the control of the PDEA agents without the presence of any counsel when information against respondents Tronco was extracted from him."

The DOJ resolution, dated Dec. 3, 2008, declared the PDEA is mistaken. It release Brodett, Joseph and Tronco.

The resolution has yet to be released by the justice secretary.

Hinoveles has said the because that the PDEA received an extension from Resado that the case was already for filing at a local court.

Low morale

"But he (Resado) said he could not handle Zuño," Maravillosa said.

The PDEA was later told that the case lacked probable cause.

"My men now are suffering from low morale. We did our job, but they were the ones dismissed," Maravillosa said.

SC ruling dream come true for Manila Bay warrior

From page A1

tion of the Manila Bay.

In 1999, he decided to do something about it. That year, he filed a case before the regional trial court in Imus to compel government agencies to clean up the bay.

The case was elevated to the high court. And last Dec. 18, after nine years of legal wrath, the Supreme Court ordered the government to immediately clean up the bay.

For Oposa, 54, the dream started in the late 1980s when he came across a study that showed that if the bay was properly cared for, "it could feed Metro Manila with enough fish. The bay has recreational value and is a national treasure."

Outrage

However, stakeholders, including some local officials, "ignored the problem; they couldn't care less. No one was interested in cleaning up the bay."

According to the study, there was almost one million tons of fecal matter per cubic meter in the waters of Manila Bay, way above the normal level of 23 units. The environmentalist in Oposa was outraged and he decided to take matters into his own hands.

"I am just a lawyer and I tell my story through the law. I thought that this needed to be brought to the attention of the public and the concerned government agencies," he said.

He brought the issue to his students in environmental law as the UP and they agreed to help and stood as plaintiffs.

Oposa said he wanted to include his students to the suit "so that there is continuity even if I am not around anymore."

He thought the issue to his students in environmental law as the UP and they agreed to help and stood as plaintiffs.

Oposa said he wanted to include his students to the suit "so that there is continuity even if I am not around anymore."

I wanted to make it applicable: "He also included his then 3-month-old son, Aaron Agustin, in the list of plaintiffs.

Discovery of little known law

As the years went by, Oposa's students graduated and he was left to fight the battle alone. Fortunately, he was able to get the help of lawyer Sigfrid Fortun.

Oposa said he discovered a little known, DYU law, Presidential Decree No. 979 which mandates all that when bodies of waters are polluted, it is the duty of the government to clean it up.

"Only two people knew of

ENVIRONMENT EXPERT Lawyer Antonio Oposa says that the presence of a butterfly fish is an indicator of unpolluted waters during a press conference with the Ateneo and Silliman University Coast Conservation and Research Expedition 2008. JOEY RAZON/INQUIRER

that law: me and former President Marcos," Oposa said.

He said he met stiff resistance from national government agencies he argued before the high court that the cleanup of Manila Bay was a "political question" and therefore are subject to legal action.

Nevertheless, he thanked his opponents as the Office of the Solicitor General for bringing the matter up to the Supreme Court.

Final, executory

"Their appeal in the Supreme Court has resulted in this decision. Finally, we have a final and executory decision on the matter that is respected by all."

Fighting-wise, in behalf of the government is not entirely true to Oposa.

It was Oposa who filed a case in 1981 against the then Environment Secretary Fulgencio Factoran to cancel all logging concessions "in behalf of the children and future generations." He won that time, a landmark case before the Supreme Court in 1993.

In 1999, he earned a campaign to clean up the rivers of Davao, Cavite, in cooperation with the local governments.

"That project was successful. But when the rains came, the waste matter from Davao that came flowing in and we were back where we started," he said.

A lack of political will

In fairness to local officials, Oposa said he saw many local governments and agencies wanting to do something about Manila Bay. "But they lacked the political will," he said.

"I know many want to do the right thing. Even Mayor Lito Atienza, [Chairman of the International Bar of the Philippines and the Philippine Bar Association] still wants to discuss measures to monitor the implementation of the cleanup.

One of the initial ideas is to "involve the private sector, which can concerned, asking for a report on the progress of the cleanup, with a copy to be furnished the Supreme Court.

"If government agencies and local governments weren't in the cleanup, they will have to be answerable to the high court," he said.

Wastewater treatment

He also said he agreed with the call of Environment Secretary Lito Atienza for wastewater treatment concessionaires in Metro Manila—Manila Water and Maynilad—to immediately set up wastewater treatment facilities as a start in the cleanup of the bay.

Oposa cited another study that showed that four million gallons, or 16 million liters of raw untreated sewage, were being dumped into Manila Bay every day.

"If we look at our water bill, we pay a sewerage fee. How come there is no compliance or here for the past 10 years?" he asked.

For Oposa, the fight to save Manila Bay has just begun and he anticipates the day when he would see the bay back to its pristine beauty.

"Even if the Supreme Court decision reminds us that we are responsible for the environment to our youth and future generations," he said.

'Paradise to Paradise' route now open via Seair

From page A1

from Dilawan.

"It needs to be so near yet so far. Its so welcome this, and we hope that this flight will provide more exchange between our people," Tangku Zainal Adlin, Sabah Tourism Board chair, said at the resort's recent launch to the Kota Kinabalu airport.

Sabah, according to him, has "its strengths, according to Zainal, "Where in the world can you find Sabah's Red, the Underground River and Mount Kinabalu?" he said.

Palawan hub

The link connects the hustle of connecting flights via Manila or Cebu before getting to neighboring countries like Malaysia, which is less than an hour from Palawan on Seair's Dornier 328 aircraft.

"We are looking at creating a hub in Palawan that will cut the necessity of passing through Manila or Cebu and make Palawan more attractive to tourists because of easy access," said Patrick Tan, Seair vice president for commercial affairs.

The opening of the link between our two Malaysian and Palawan cause as a propitious time. The Puerto Princesa airport is undergoing renovation and is expected to improve its services by the end of the year.

The choice of Kota Kinabalu for Seair's first international destination was crucial to promote the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East Asean Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA) agreement, Roan says.

Seair Aviation Capricorn said.

BIMP-EAGA was launched in March 1994 upon the proposal of then Philippine President Fidel V. Ramos to expand economic cooperation among poorer areas in the four countries in the hinterlands of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), it aims to boost trade, investment and tourism in the subregion. Included in the growth area are Mindanao and Palawan.

The opening of the route marked the first time that a BIMP-EAGA carrier was flying between two points in the five countries.

"Easy access to the tourist destinations in our key to a successful tourism program ... Seair is beginning to do this with the introduction of services between Puerto Princesa and KK," he said.

Dreams come true

Transportation Undersecretary Ernesto Tanodra said the long-awaited opening of the route was a "dream come true."

"The promotion of tourism is an important part of the BIMP-EAGA because of the vision of having one economic community in the Asean by 2015," Tanodra said.

He said the Department of Tourism would promote four-star attractions not only in the Philippines but also in the three member-countries as part of the push to create a stronger regional economy.

SCENIC ATTRACTION Tourists enjoy the fare-hour river cruise in Kota Kinabalu that is topped by the setting sun

From Boracay to Palawan

Seair also linked Boracay and Puerto Princesa for the first time as part of its "Paradise-to-Paradise" route.

Its station in Boracay's powdery white-sand beach may choose to be off directly to Palawan, which has its own share of world-renowned dive spots in El Nido and Coron.

Beach lovers then can make the most of their trip without the usual backtracking through Clark (Pampanga) Caticlan-Puerto Princesa-Kota Kinabalu.

The entire served destinations, especially in Mindanao, are being tapped by the airline because of the growing number of businessmen and tourists, according to Zapanta.

"We have been strengthening our domestic destinations by introducing new ones with great tourism potential. These include Bicol (Daraga), Subic (Oyster), Davi (Limasawa Shoal), Tablas (Romblon) and Bonsogon (Eastern Samar)," he said.

The airline, however, denied, he said Seair may increase its once-a-week flights from Caticlan to Palawan, and Palawan to Kota Kinabalu, to twice a week.

What's definite is the airline will expand its operations in Clark by opening flights to Bacolod and Iloilo, followed by Hong Kong, Cebu and Davao.

But for now, a quicker gateway to Malaysia's prime eco-sector destination seems more than enough.

Southeast Asia's highest peak

There's much to do in Kota Kinabalu, which has a population of half a million. It has mostly cold-rise buildings instead of skyscrapers like Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, and billboards are kept to a minimum unlike in Metro Manila.

The Sabah Tourism Board, which is in charge of marketing Kota Kinabalu, may up what the city offers..."new treasures from mountain high to ocean deep."

Kinabalu Park, Malaysia's first World Heritage site, is popular among hikers who want to climb Mt. Kinabalu, the highest peak in Southeast Asia. The park is also home to stunning flora and fauna and the Poring Hot Springs.

Activities like white-water rafting and snorkeling—the closest thing to diving—also attract the more adventurous, while a trip to the Lok Kawi Wildlife Park or a riverboat ride to spot the proboscis monkey, a creature endemic to Sabah, would appeal to those who love nature.

As for food trips that Filipinos are fond of, Kota Kinabalu is no letdown with its fresh seafood, and the interesting mix of Chinese, Indian and Malaysian tastes in its cuisine.

Shopping for beach bea pearls and colorful handicrafts is also tempting. Just look forward to at the so-called "Filipino-market" (a meggo like area with a handful of Filipino vendors who migrated to Malaysia).

Sultan of Sulu

There are tens of thousands of Filipinos, mainly from Mindanao, in Sabah, which is owned by the Sultan of Sulu. Sabah was incorporated into the Federation of Malaysia in the 1960s when the British granted it independence. The British had leased Sabah from the Sultan of Sulu. The Philippines' pending claim to Sabah is dormant at this time.

The Philippines has never relinquished its claim to Sabah and Kuala Lumpur continues to pay a yearly rent to the heirs of the Sultan of Sulu.

With Inquirer Research

Cardona ahead in Player of Conference race

CARDONA shows way to scoring

By Cedrif P. Tigas

LEFT OUT OF THE ALL-PBA NATIONAL team, Mac Cardona is proving his worth in the 40th PBA Philippine Cup.

The pacesetter Talk N Text guard leads the league in statistical points at the end of the double-round elimination phase, propping up his chances for Best Player of the Conference honors.

Cardona, the former La Salle standout who tremendously remembered on the Tropang Texters' successful bid for an outright semifinal berth, rules the scoring department with 23.8 points a game and sets the pace in the stats race with 20.4 SPs (statistical points) per outing.

He is also averaging 4.7 rebounds, 2.4 assists and 1.1 steals a game.

Reigning Most Valuable Player Kelly Williams of Sta. Lucia is second with 22.3 SPs, followed by Coca-Cola's dat Tenlawa (32.5), Alaska's Willie Miller (32.0) and Talk N' Text's Hanidel de Ocampo (31.4).

The top five at the end of the semifinal round will command the five NBC awards in a balloting among the four-man special committee, the media and the players. The winner will be named before Game Four of the best-of-seven finals.

Gordon's Jaypee Belencbreed (30.5 SPs), San Miguel Beer's Jay Washington (30.3), Purefoods' Korby Raymundo (29.8), Barako Bull's Jay R. Reyes (28.2) and Purefoods' James Yap (28.1) round out the Top 10.

Tenlawa, Raymundo and Yap are three players in the top 10 whose teams have already been eliminated from the tournament.

Yap pick Eddie Sorowong leads all rookies in statistics with (27.4 SPs), followed by backcourt buddy Ted Alvarado (24.2), Talk N Text's Jerwin Gaffarou (23.7) and San Miguel's Reuben Crumrine (23.6).

Magic cast spell on listless Bulls

TORONTO Raptors' Will Solomon (right) leads a driving Linas Kleiza of the Denver Nuggets.

CHICAGO—THE ORLANDO MAGIC LOOKED A DIFFERENT TEAM FROM THE ONE that stumbled to an untidy loss in their last game, an improved offensive display giving them a comprehensive 113-94 victory over the Chicago Bulls on Wednesday.

Rashard Lewis led seven Magic scorers in double figures with 21 points as the Southeast Division leaders quickly erased the memory of their 103-96 loss to the Detroit Pistons.

Hedo Turkoglu added 18 points and nine rebounds, while Dwight Howard had 16 points and 14 rebounds for Orlando, who took a commanding 63-38 lead at halftime on Lewis' 16 points.

Despite the setback against Detroit, Orlando (25-7) has won 25-of-30 games since losing to open big two contests of the campaign and are just two losses behind the Boston Celtics and Cleveland Cavaliers at the top of the Eastern Conference.

"It's not being arrogant or cocky [but] when we step on the floor we expect to win," Magic point guard Jameer Nelson said.

The Magic converted 21 triples to complement Howard's solid work in the paint.

"If you don't double-team Howard, he kills you inside," first-year Bulls coach Vinny Del Negro said. "They have shooters around him... it makes it hard on your defensive rotations.

Chicago reserve Jannero Pargo put up 19 points and 11 rebounds while Ben Gordon scored 18 points in the Bulls' fourth loss of the season at the United Center.

The Bulls (14-19) have lost four of their last five, handing against a run of injuries that left them without power forward Drew Gooden (ankle), guard Kirk Hinrich (thumb) and small forward Luol Deng (ankle) against the Magic.

In Toronto, the home team notched its eighth consecutive win over Willowbrook, 65-61.

San Ming had 22 points and 18 rebounds to lead the way for the Rookets, who responded to an embarrassing loss to lowly Washington on Monday.

The Bucks have lost nine consecutive games in Houston.

—Reuters, AP

SBP plans US training camp for Fil-Ams

By Jane Mariano

IN AN EFFORT TO BEEF UP THE National team, the Samahang Basketbol ng Pilipinas will open a training camp in the United States for foreign players with Filipino roots sometime in April.

SBP executive director Noli Eala said the US camp may be formed in the Nike Camp and will coincide with a series of tournaments involving the national team that will be formed for the 2013 Southeast Asian Games.

On top of the list of US-national prospects whom the SBP intends to invite are Gian Chiu and Jayson Aquilar, a pair of 6-foot-9 standouts who are seeing action in the UP PCAA.

"We plan to invite Jayson and Gian to our training camp in the US and then hopefully include them both in the team that will play in the Nike-Asia Championship Cup in May," said Eala.

Eala said the SBP has appointed Jim Jeffy "Jaworo Nagoire" owner director for player personnel, as chief scouting director in the US.

Jeffy has reportedly identified several players willing to don the national colors.

Eala said the 25-player development squad under project director Jerebee coach Rajko Toroman would remain training in Mandaluyong. They will fly to Serbia in March for a series of workouts before proceeding to the US.

Eala said Aquilar, of Pittsburg Erie, Indy University in the US PCAA Division I, and Chiu, a starter for NCAA division III's Oberlin College, are interested in representing the country and will add ceiling to the pool.

The SBP said it would bid for the hosting of the Southeast Asian Basketball Championship next year, a pair of qualifying tournaments for the August-based Nike Asia Championship in Saipan.

"We want to host these Stanka qualifiers apart and also participate in other tournaments next year," said Eala.

Other tournaments the SBP plans to join next year are the Stanka Women's Championship (June 1 to 13), Stanka Under-16 Women's Championship (July 26 to 30) and the Stanka Under-16 Men's Championship (July 23 to 29).

NBA wars: Favorites in early surge

ONE GAME AT A TIME
Sev Sarmenta

A COMMON LINE you will often hear from NBA broadcasters these days is "If the playoffs were played today..." as the updated team standings are finalized. It's their way of keeping us interested in the playoff race, even if only just over 20 games have been played by the teams out of an 82-game season.

Most of the preseason predictions are being fulfilled, with the favorites posting frontend quickly to set the pace. The season still has a long way to go but it gives you an idea of the thinking that separates the NBA cats basically three groups: contenders, might-just-make-its and hopefuls.

Keep in mind that the top eight teams from each conference earn the playoffs. Divisional positions are disregarded in determining the top spots, with ties broken by results of games between the tied teams, winning percentages or point differentials. Finishing well in the standings gives you homecourt advantage that is critical when playoff games are close.

Let's look at some of the frontrunners to date and check on the second group after a month. The hopefuls may just get more pertinent winning runs and we will revisit them in March.

As of Jan. 1, the Eastern Conference finds Boston (28-5), Cleveland (26-5), Orlando (23-7) and Atlanta (21-10) as the top four possessors. The defending champion Celtics are done with a difficult Christmas road trip that saw their 19-game winning streak snapped by the Los Angeles Lakers, 92-83. It was compounded by a 99-89 loss to the lowly Golden State Warriors a day after.

The Celtics, Cavs, Magic and Hawks would move on to the next round if the playoffs were held today (with Detroit (19-11) and possibly Miami (17-11) crowding Atlanta for the fourth spot.

The Celtics' winning run was marked by a gritty determination to run useful first halves into winnable games. It was almost as if a playoff outlook had already dawned on the Celtics, who are obviously intent on being the No. 1 seed in the East once the Celtic teams of 1968-1969.

The playoff mood was not enough, though, in the fourth quarter of their Christmas game against the Lakers.

Ned Gasol was everywhere as he defied the Boston defense, scoring seven of his 20 points in the last three minutes. Kobe Bryant is clearly comfortable passing to Gasol when he is jammed, confident that the Spanish star will do good things with the ball.

The West has the Lakers (23-3), New Orleans (19-9), San Antonio (20-11) and Denver and Houston (both at 20-12) as the top-five teams. The race in the West is tighter and features like Portland, Dallas, Phoenix and Utah rounding the Nuggets or Rockets.

So what if the playoffs were played today? In the East, Boston and Cleveland should end up in the conference finals. Cleveland is determined to get back in the finals and win a championship that could keep LeBron James happy enough to stay.

In the West, it's hard not to see the Lakers returning to the finals. The only team that could probably challenge them would be San Antonio, unless the Spurs cannot match the Lakers' Bubble-and-no-sweat. Although they lost to LA last year, the Spurs have a playoff attitude that makes them a perennial and lasting dark part of the season.

New Orleans, though, may have something about that as they move step closer last year to handing in the conference finals, losing only to San Antonio, 4-3, in the semifinals. 2006 Rookie of the Year Chris Paul is again playing heads-up ball, averaging 21 points and 11 assists this season and could lead the Hornets to another great charge to the playoffs.

A Boston-LA finals would not be impossible nor would a Cleveland-LA session. Those three are already on playoff mode, hoping to get not only more wins but also confidence to go very far once the real playoffs begin.

SPORTSWATCH

SM Bowling Cup slated

BOWLERS FROM MANILA AND CEBU vie for top honors in the 6th SM Bowling Cup Junior National Finals in February.

Up for grabs is a brand new Nissan Sentra, which will be awarded to the overall champion.

The Cebu event is the season's second tournament. It will be capped by the Pepsi Grand National Finals on May 17.

The Pepsi Grand Finals will have three divisions—the elite, which is open for monetarily including foreign and professional bowlers, seniors (55 and above) and bantam (for kids 12 years old and below).

By Ray Chavez
de San Lazaro LP

CEBU WINNERS Members of the Daisy Condonado-Sacred Heart School of Jesus squad celebrate their nail-biting championship victory over Another Bench-Ateneo de Davao, 25-17, in the Cebu leg of the National Basketball Training Center (NBTC)'s U-9 Longos Cebu division. Bato Balaraosa was adjudged as MVP in the first conference of the tournament presented by Nokia under the auspices of the Samahang Basketbol ng Pilipinas.

SBC Alabang quintet MNCAA jr champion

SAN BEDA COLLEGE ALABANG DOWNED St. Stephen's High School, 59-58, to cop the Junior basketball title of the 5th Men's National Collegiate Athletic Association (MNCAA) recently, even as La Consolacion Manila ineligible squad was also in the fray.

Angelo-san Collegian busted La Consolacion for third place in the junior division, 82-59.

In senior play, La Consolacion pours the hole with a 4-0 clash with San Beda second at 4-1.

Philippine Women's University dumped University of Asia and the Pacific, 74-52, to stay in third spot at 4-2, a full game behind Centro Escolar University, 5-2, also in.

Olivaz Bat Shak College finally won after four tries, beating Entrepreneurs School of Asia, 77-71, 4th in existence in five games.

So best player but RP falters

Turn to page A14

a higher performance rating of 27.06.

For the effort, he, whose rating of 30.63 jumped to 26.27 in the latest quarterly rankings released by the World Chess Federation, pocketed $3,000, apart from his share in Tuguegarao's $6,000 purse.

Handling black, Zhou Jianchao secured himself of the board-one gold by offering a draw to Gomez after just 13 moves of a Sicilian Opening.

One of contenders for individual honors, Gomez accepted and savored up his score with 4 points on three wins, two draws and one draw.

Tuguegarao Jun, which came after 76 moves of a Bogo-Indian Defense, put him out of the board three rounds race.

He secured up with 4.5 points on four wins, two losers and one draw.

The 18-year-old Lodo split the point with Canadian Master Nguyen the duo after 38 moves of an English Opening to climb to the board 2 Jun. Gomez with 3.5 points, including five wins and one loss. The other was worth $300.

Enrico Tuguegarao-IV dumped Al Jihada of Yemen, 4.0; Mon-Cad of Mongolia, 3.5-0.5; and Tajikistan, 4-0, before being humbled by di Ate 6, 0.5-3.5, in the fourth round.

Successive victories over Qub-Ja-Ja, 2.5-1.5, and Club Isadora of Hungarian, 2.5-0.5, however, pushed the Filipino back in contention in the last round up with Zhou.

Jun, who is also a member of the Philippine team that will play in the 39th Chess Olympiad in Dresden, Germany in November, will be awarded $1,000 for his efforts.

Chinese reserve Jianchao Huan per up 19 points and 11 rebounds while Ben Gordon scored 18 points in the Bulls' fourth loss of the season at the United Center.

The Bulls (14-19) have lost four of their last five, handing against a run of injuries that left them without power forward Drew Gooden (ankle), guard Kirk Hinrich (thumb) and small forward Luol Deng (ankle) against the Magic.

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—Reuters, AP

Editor Teddyboy S. Melendrez • Assistant Editor Francis T. J. Ochoa

SPORTS

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PGA suspends Daly for 6 months

JOHN DALY SWINGS HIS CLUB TO SHOT OFF THE TOP OF A tree can during a pro-am. At another tournament, he is harassed from a rain delay with Tampa Bay Rays owners coach Joe Maddon as his caddie. Such actions, the five-time major winner contends Wednesday, earned him a PGA Tour suspension for the next six months. "It's not fair or reality, but it's probably fair in perception," said Daly. AP

UNBEATEN Wesley So tops board one race.

So best player but RP falters

Tagaytay squad winds up fourth

By Ray Luarca

AL AIN, UAE—GMs MENELTON WESLEY So came away with the 1st Asian Chess Cup's best player plaque, but Team Tagay Ay City-Philippines could do no better than fourth place among 58 teams here.

The ray of hope provided by three rather crass turned out to be an illusion as the Philippines yielded to China, 1.5 and 2.5, in the seventh and final round at the Al Ain Sports Club on Wednesday.

So and fellow Filipino grandmasters Darwin Laylo and John Paul Gomez split the point with their foes, Int. GM Mark Paragua frustrated against Zhou Weiqi in board three, enabling the Chinese to amass 12 match points and catch powerhouse Al Ain Team A co-op.

Al Ain A, which was held to a 2-2 draw by Vietnam Money Club, finished the event with a better tiebreak score but had to split the first and second prizes with the Chinese. Each team won $16,000.

Int. Master of law tortured Cherbik Ooi of Uzbekistan, 3.5-0.5, to tally 11 points, good for third place and $8,000.

Continuing his fine showing against super GMs, the 13-year-old So held Wang Hao to a draw with the black pieces to their fate battle that took 51 moves to settle.

So wound up with 5.5 points on four wins and three draws, the same score of Vietnam Money Club's GM Nguyen Ngoc Truong Son and Ukrainian super GM Sergey Karjakin—the highest rated player in the field with an Elo of 2740 with which he split the point in the fourth round. ...See week board one features on

Aplus METRO
Editor Rhodora S. Ulanday
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2009 off to a good start for firemen

By Nancy C. Carvajal

AS 2008 DREW TO A CLOSE, FIREMEN ALL OVER Metro Manila prepared for the worst—New Year's Eve being one of their busiest nights of the year.

When dawn broke, however, on the first day of the new year, only two fires had been reported so far, which the chief of the Bureau of Fire Protection–National Capital Region office took as a good sign.

"The almost zero fire incidence is a good sign that the bureau's massive information efforts on fire prevention have paid off," Senior Supt. Nicholas Cordova told the Inquirer yesterday.

Based on a report from third Insp. Danilo Jarabe, Quezon City Fire District Station 4 head, a fire broke out in Teachers Village, Quezon City, destroying a house and its upholstery shop.

Jarabe said the fire that started at around 12:07 a.m. yesterday was placed under control at 12:58 a.m.

Except for a boy who suffered burns in his rush to get out of the burning house, no one else was injured, he added.

Fire investigators estimated the damage to property at around P1 million.

The cause of the blaze, however, was still being determined.

"We are still investigating the cause as there were accounts from residents on the area that a firecracker was accidentally thrown into the upholstery shop at the height of the merrymaking and may have started the flames," Cordova said.

In Manila, a fire hit a house on F. Tobel–Bonso Street in Sta. Ana at 12:12 a.m. yesterday destroying P50,000 worth of property.

The homeowner, Ricky Serrosil, suffered minor burns to her hand when she tried to put out the blaze which was caused by an unattended candle.

SPO2 Wilfredo Tana of the Manila Fire District Action Investigators unit said Torrenil was standing outside her house and watching the fireworks when she realized that her curtains were on fire.

The blaze reached the second floor before it was put out by responding firefighters at around 12:30 a.m.

"Compared to previous years, where at least 8 to 10 fire incidents were reported at the height of the New Year's Eve celebration, yesterday's [fire incidents were] a good improvement...," Cordova said.

He expressed confidence that the number of fires even during the summer months could also be reduced and promised to continue the bureau's information drive on preventing fires.

Cordova said that for the past months, he and his men have been going around barangays, giving fire prevention tips to local leaders and residents.

With Antonette I. Andrade

FIREMEN did not see much action on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day with only two fires reported in Metro Manila, including one which hit choice and upholstery shop in Teachers Village, Quezon City. Both fires were put out in less than 30 minutes and no deaths were reported. Metro Manila fire chief Senior Supt. Pedrito Cordova attributed the low incidence of fire at the start of the year to the Bureau of Fire Prevention's information drive.

THE NEW OBLATION on the grounds of the Philippine General Hospital.

Seeing double: UP Manila has 2 Oblations

By Celia M. Bonilla
Contributor

WHEN OFFICIALS OF THE UNIVERSITY of the Philippines Manila unveiled a second Oblation in front of the Philippine General Hospital last year, just a few people in and outside the university heard it—not odd—but a bit outrageous.

Shouldn't the P1 million spent on the new Oblation have used instead to improve the dismal facilities of any of the units on the campus or even in the hospital, which is badly in need of elevators that actually work?

Wouldn't it have been better to just spruce up the old Oblation in front of Bond Hall (College of Arts and Sciences) on Padre Burgos and improve its surroundings? Or was it not possible to have the statue moved (as this new site)? That would have been the safe synergetic move to stop any more talks about spinning off PGH into a private hospital and removing its reputation as UP Manila's (strong) ground.

Centennial marker

Dr. Zenayda Lequesada, UP Manila Vice Chancellor for Planning and Development, clarified that the new Oblation is also a centennial marker—2008 being the university's 100th year.

"On its base are the seals of the different colleges of UP Manila as well as the National Academy of Health (research arm) and the PGH (service arm)," she pointed out.

"The Oblation should distinguish UP Manila from all the other campuses. Of all the UP constituent universities, it is only UP Manila that has a presence in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. In Palo, Leyte, we have the Ray School of Health Sciences [RSH] which was awarded the 2008 Presidential Lingkod Bayan for excellence in community health service. In Baler, Aurora, we inaugurated on July 21 the second SHE mini-schools from Aurora, Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Quirino and Nueva Ecija. The conversion of a third SHE, this time in Bicutan[a] in south-central Mindanao, is underway," she said.

Lequesada added that each SHE would also get its own Oblation eventually, and that Sen. Eduardo Angara had pledged to sponsor the one in Baler.

Still, some questions remain: Why is the new Oblation in PGH? Did the hospital fund it?

PI-PI funding

Lequesada admitted that the hospital administration under Director Carmelo Alfiler was initially against ordering another statue. The P1 million funding came from UP Manila's 2007 reprogrammed budget, she added.

As for the location, Lequesada said they entered the new Oblation to be displayed prominently. "The PGH is centrally located; it is the overarching hospital of all the colleges, even of the College of Arts and Sciences."

"Moreover, the Oblation should be where the chancellor is," she added. The current chancellor, Dr. Ramon L. Arcadio, who is on his second term, holds office at the eighth floor of the PGH Central Block where all the administrative offices are located.

Lequesada said the artist they commissioned for the project, Dr. Orosa Javier Alfonso, UP Open University chancellor, is one of only two artists Ilocanos in the a cast of the Oblations from the original statue. The other is National Artist Napoleon Abueva.

Alfonso used an amalgamation of bronze fillings and fiberglass after creating a rubber mold from the original Oblation which is kept in UP Diliman's main library. The new Oblation has been described on the market as an "inconsistent work with National Artist Guillermo Tolentino's UP Oblation."

Rubber mold

In a phone interview, Dr. Alfonso explained, "With the rubber mold, you can capture all the details. My intention would be the way I featured the bronze from the seal of Old Manila, the hoplopris or alibata of UP, the seals of the different UP Manila colleges, and the letras of scholarship or the 'sobby' on that pedestal of academic excellence. They are all centered in the P1 million budget."

Alfonso, a UP College of Fine Arts graduate, was a student of Anastacio Caedo, who, in turn, was a student of Tolentino. She recalled Caedo telling her, "Bimilam mo ito ha? Ako ang model ni Tolentino. (Remember this. I am Tolentino's model.)" Caedo's athletic physique complemented the sculptor's style, she recalled, Tolentino's brother-in-law, Virgilio Hilapanda.

The new Oblation statue is eight feet tall while its pedestal is also eight feet high.

The very first Oblation created by Tolentino was made of concrete painted to look like bronze. Students and faculty members in the 1963-1964 raised P1,000 to fund its creation.

According to Hal Rene Hess's book on Tolentino, the statue was unveiled during the 1933 National Heroes Day celebration on the Padre

DENNIS ALA

Work to start on QC's widest road network

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A ROAD connecting Commonwealth Avenue to Quirino Highway in Quezon City will begin next month.

"This is a longtime dream and it is finally pushing through," Mayor Feliciano Belmonte said recently in a statement, referring to the Commonwealth Avenue Extension Project.

According to Belmonte, the new road will be completed within five to six months.

The project includes the construction of a six-lane highway with provisions for sidewalks and a drainage system.

The new road is expected to improve the flow of traffic on Commonwealth and Quezon Avenues, Tandang Sora and Visayas Avenue and El Sprinal Road.

It will also provide motorists with an alternative route to Mindanao Avenue Extension in Novaliches and the North Luzon Expressway via the Mindanao Ave in Valenzuela City.

"The new road is the city's widest road network and bisects Quezon City and goes all the way to its boundary in the Caloocan City area," Belmonte said.

The project, which is part of the World Bank-assisted Metro Manila Urban Transport Integration Project, is a joint undertaking of the Department of Public Works and Highways and the city government.

Nancy C. Carvajal

Judge to rule on Leviste murder case on Jan. 14

By Allison W. Lopez

FORMER BIGWIGGAS GOV. JOSE ANsonio Leviste, who is charged with the murder of his longtime aide, will know his fate in a few days.

Senior State Prosecutor Emmanuel Velasco said Judge Elmo Alameda of the Makati Regional Trial Court Branch 150 has set the promulgation of Leviste's case at 9 a.m. on Jan. 14.

"I don't want to second-guess what the judge will decide. The prosecution has done its best," Velasco told the Inquirer in a recent interview.

He said the batches of proof was on the defense since Leviste claimed he killed Rafael de los Alas in self-defense during a heated arguments on Jan. 12, 2007, at the Lft. Tenorio in Legaspi Village, Makati City.

Defense witnesses said the victim arrived for work on that day in an angry and agitated mood, supposedly because he vented to confront Leviste over money matters.

But prosecution witnesses said De los Alas had no intention of going to work that morning and had made plans to go shopping with his daughter and grandchildren.

He changed his plans, however, after Leviste allegedly summoned him to his office, they added.

FIRECRACKER 'CASUALTY'
A portion of the structure underneath the tracks of the Light Rail Transit's Line 1 on Rizal Avenue in Sta. Cruz, Manila, collapsed yesterday. Witnesses said the damage was caused by firecrackers set off on New Year's Eve.

Peacemaker shot dead, teen hurt in gang war

By Jeannette I. Andrade

A 42-YEAR-OLD MAN WAS SHOT AND stabbed to death just hours after the start of the new year when he stopped to try to stop a brawl between warring teenagers in Manila.

The victim also left a 16-year-old youth fatally wounded after he was hit by a stray bullet.

Jeanelle Miranda, a resident of 6 Tejeron Street in Barangay 792, Sta. Ana, Manila, was declared dead on arrival at the Philippine General Hospital due to a bullet wound in the head. His body also bore bruises and cuts from the beating he took from his attackers.

On other hand, Isaiah Isidel Pichel, the Sanggunian Kabataan chair of Barangay 792, remained under observation in the same hospital for a bullet wound in the arm.

Police said they were looking for a 17-year-old boy who reportedly shot Miranda and two other men identified as Joshua Ortiz and an alias Jiros, all residents of Brgy. Sector 6 in Barangay 793, who escaped after the incident.

Based on reports from the Manila Police District homicide section, two groups of teenagers from Barangays 792 and 793 clashed in front of a gasoline station at the corner of A. Tejeron and Pedro Gil Avenue at 3:30 a.m. yesterday.

SPO2 Dennis Javier said witnesses told the police that Miranda, a bystander, tried to stop one of the teenagers from wresting a member of the rival gang.

His action, however, drew the ire of the other group who thought he was siding with their enemies, Javier said.

At this point, the 17-year-old shot Miranda in the head with a rampal (improvised shotgun) while Ortiz and Jiros took turns beating up the victim, the police investigator added.

Pichel, meanwhile, was buying load for his cell phone from a nearby bakery when he was hit by a stray bullet.

Javier said members of the rival gangs fled when barangay tanodmen and policemen arrived on the scene to break up the fight.

Proposed ordinance bans age discrimination in offices

By Julie M. Aurelio

EMPLOYERS SHOULD HIRE JOB APPLIcants based on their skills and not their age.

Quezon City councilors have proposed an ordinance which bans employers from discriminating against older people when it comes to hiring new workers.

The measure was filed by Councilors Jaime Manuel Bonoy, Bernadette Herrera-Dy, Winston Castelo, Edcel Medina and Wencesclao Recardo Legasto[illegible] who said that job seekers with the capacity and desire so much deserve to be hired, regardless of their age.

Under proposed ordinance No. 2008-183, employers will no longer be allowed to summarily prospective applicants, especially older ones, just because of their age.

"Age discrimination in employment is quite obvious. Job advertisements in papers specify an age range. Thus, older people are barred from applying for jobs that they may be qualified for," the measure said.

If passed by the council, the ordinance will ban employers from limiting, segregating or classifying employees "in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of his employment opportunities or negatively affect his status as an employee because of one's age."

Prior notices or advertisements of job offerings which indicate age preferences will also be prohibited.

The measure imposes a P1,000 fine on violators while their business licenses could also be revoked for repeated violations.

In 2008, the city council adopted a resolution urging all businesses in Quezon City to hire employees regardless of age as well as the school they attended.

Seeing double . . .

From page A-9

Hecta quadruplet, Gregoria de Jesus, wife of ex-Senator Benigno Aquino Jr., and son of Andres Bonifacio and descendant of Apolinario Mabini, was the special guest.

Tribute to unknown heroes

Tolentino had been quoted to give the explanation of his wish. "The completely nude figure of a young man with outstretched arms and open hands, wide chisel head, closed eyes and jutted lips motioning a prayer, with bronze license if to the act of offering himself, is my interpretation of that selfless source (from Rizal's "Mi Ultimo Adios"). It symbolizes all the unknown heroes who fell during the night. The statue stands on a native base, a confused rugged shape of the Philippine archipelago, lined with big and small hard rocks, each of which represents an island."

According to Tolentino, "The 3.5 meter height of the statue stands for the 350 years of Spanish rule in the Philippines."

The First Gentleman (without Mrs.) later flew the quadrangle of UP Padre Faura next to "oculus" to the Diliman campus on Feb. 11, 1949, when it was installed in front of Quezon Hall.

Second statue

In 1950, the Board of Regents approved the Oblation's bronze casting and had it done in Italy under Tolentino's supervision. In 1958, the original statue was brought inside the main library while the bronze Oblation took its place to mark UP's golden anniversary.

So, you see, UP Diliman also has two Oblations, with the second one marking the 50th year of the university.

MAN AND MACHINE
A garbage collector has to use a front loader to scoop up the trash left on the streets in Divisoria, Manila.

DID YOU KNOW

ACCORDING to the 2003 National Demographic and Health Survey, about 19.2 percent of Metro Manila children born in the five years preceding the survey were breastfed.

Cecil C. Mercadera, Inquirer Research

Hunt on for man who killed stepson in Parañaque

By Marlon Ramos

AS THE WORLD CELEBRED IN 2009 WITH merriment, tragedy struck a family in Parañaque City after a drunken man was reportedly stabbed dead by his stepfather.

Jessie Ramos, 26, of 417 Purok 4 Marcelle, Barangay BF Homes, succumbed to multiple stab wounds while being admitted into the Medical Center Parañaque.

His stepfather, Wilfredo Salinda, 51, fatally left after the incident and is now the subject of a police manhunt.

PO1 Arlan Brew, case investigator, said at 1:45 a.m. yesterday Salinda had just come home from a drinking spree with his neighbors. Moments after he had an argument with his mother, Veronica, after she scolded him for drinking too much.

According to Brew, the victim was caused a scene in the neighborhood when he kicked and broke a glass panel in their house as he showed aversions at his mother.

Salinda, meanwhile, tried to pacify his stepson but he ended up arguing with the victim.

Irked, Salinda pulled out a knife and stabbed the victim repeatedly, Perez said.

Ironically, the victim had been involved in at least four stabbing incidents in the past, according to the police.

Perez said they would file a charge of homicide against the victim's stepfather.

METROBRIEFS

One dead in shooting incident

A 34-YEAR-OLD passenger jeepney driver was killed while his drinking buddy was critically injured when a gun-toting neighbor allegedly shot them before dawn yesterday in Manila.

Vincent Ouano, of 539 Pedro St. in Tondo, was declared dead on arrival by attending doctors at the Mary Johnston Hospital while Alvin Magno, 34, of Wagwag Street in Tondo, is undergoing treatment at the same medical facility for a bullet wound in the abdomen. Reports from the Manila Police District homicide section showed the incident happened at around 1:45 a.m. yesterday at the corner of Pedro and Felipe Streets, Quiapo. Magno and several other friends were drinking to celebrate the start of the new year when their neighbor, Allan Pintac, and a still unidentified companion arrived and suddenly fired at them with a .45 caliber pistol. Ouano and Magno were hit, the former sustaining three gunshot wounds. Pintac and his accomplice immediately fled after the shooting while the victims were brought to the nearest hospital. Pintac was later arrested in a follow-up operation by the police who said he was high on drugs when he shot the victims. Homicide investigators have not established a motive for the attack. Pintac was detained at the MPD homicide section pending the filing of a murder charge against him while police operatives were still looking for his accomplice.

Jeannette I. Andrade

DOJ files raps vs 5 traders

THE DEPARTMENT of Justice has charged five owners of a stall in a Makati City mall for allegedly selling fake Portable PlayStation (PSP) gaming units and video game discs seven years ago. Charged at the Manila Regional Trial Court were Sally Kingued Loretta Lee, of 30-C COE Street in La Loma, Quezon City; Susan Chua, of 601-E State Center Building in La Loma Street, Gimonds, Manila; and Johnny Nubla and Emilia Nubla, of 10 Mayo Santiago St. Quezon City. The five were accused of unfair competition under Section 168 in relation to Section 170 of Republic Act No. 8293 (Intellectual Property Code of the Philippines). The case was based on a complaint filed by Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. which asked the National Bureau of Investigation for help in arresting the sale and distribution of fake PSP units.

Tina G. Santos

Buy 4 tickets of any movie in a single purchase within the promo duration at Glorietta 4 and Greenbelt 1 & 3 cinemas, and get a chance to win a new watch, free makeover or a free trip to Busuanga, Palawan good for four!!

CLUB inquirer SEAIR TIMEX glorietta GREENBELT

RESCUERS and patients examine bodies of fire victims. —

Bangkok club inferno kills 61

BANGKOK—A FRENCH FIRE TORE through an upscale Bangkok nightclub early Thursday as revellers celebrated New Year, killing at least 61 people including a foreigner and injuring more than 200 others, rescuers said.

The blaze broke out after a pyrotechnic display at the Santika club in the Thai capital's thickest district, a thronging entertainment area frequented by locals and tourists. Police said a Singaporean national was among the dead.

Relatives and friends gathered at Bangkok hospitals and outside the night spot desperately crying to find out news of lost and injured loved ones, as hysteria gripped over the district two-story building for hours.

"It appears that the fire started from the area of the stage where a band was playing. There were some pyrotechnics and it appears that they started the blaze," Police Lt. Col. Prateb Rattawal said.

"Most of the victims died from suffocation. Some were also killed in a stampede when people were trying to get out," he said.

An AFP correspondent said about 300 people gathered outside the confined offnightclub while inside, abandoned shoes and broken bottles littered the floor, testimony to the panic inside hours earlier.

"I heard that the electricity went out, so they couldn't find the exits signs or get out," said Ash Barnes from Australia, who was smoking some of a friend who was in the club when the fire broke out.

"It's horrible, horrible ... I couldn't sit downand why so many people were killed. They must have been trapped upstairs."

Police Col. Sutin Supitnarong said the blaze was still under investigation.

A Bangkok emergency services headquarters official said 207 people had been taken, adding: "There are some foreigners injured from the blaze."

The wounded were rushed to 14 hospitals around the capital suffering burns and smoke inhalation.

Japan's Kyodo news agency, citing the Japanese embassy, said four Japanese nationals were injured, one seriously.

Almost all the dead were on the ground floor, where the stage was located. About 10 charred bodies were still inside the blackened and partially collapsed structure hours after the inferno.

The club, popular with Bangkok's elite, has a capacity of 1,000 people but it was not clear how many were in there at the time of the blaze.

Fire brigade officials said the death toll was high because there were few exits from the building and burglar windows on the upper floors had iron bars across them.

"There was only one main way to get out from the front. People who worked there were able to escape from the back because they know the exits, but the others had no chance," senior fireman Pracharapong Jitchareid said.

Some victims were trapped in the basement of the club, which was accessible via a narrow stairwell, he said. The roof of the building had also collapsed during the blaze.

Police said the fire broke out between midnight and 1 a.m., shortly after revellers had celebrated the coming of the New Year. AFP

US troops under Iraq's authority for first time

BAGHDAD—THE US MILITARY IN IRAQ falls under Iraqi authority on Thursday for the first time since the US-led invasion ousted Saddam Hussein in 2003, a milestone in the war-weary country's path to regaining sovereignty.

The US forces in Iraq, now more than 140,000 strong, has operated since 2003 under a UN Security Council resolution which expired at midnight on New Year's Eve.

Starting Jan. 1, troops will operate under the authority of the Iraqi government, according to a pact signed earlier this year by Washington and Baghdad.

The pact gives US troops three years to leave Iraq, revokes their power to detain Iraqis without an Iraqi warrant, and subjects contractors and, in some cases, US troops to Iraqi law.

The new, tough terms of the US presence have been welcomed by an increasingly confident Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, established by a mounting chronology, military victories against Shiite militias and progress against al-Qaeda militants.

US and Iraqi officials held a ceremony on Thursday (Friday in Manila) morning to formally hand over control of the Green Zone, the heavily fortified Baghdad compound from which the United States governed Iraq directly for more than a year after the invasion. (See sidebar)

US to pay rent at Green Zone, heart of occupation

BAGHDAD—FOR NEARLY SIX YEARS, the Green Zone has been such an enduring shorthand for a brilliantly unpenetrated occupation of Iraq that it is easy to forget it is an actual place.

But it is a real, or surreal, village of Pentagon and Ugandan guards, Filipino laundresses, British military contractors, American soldiers and diplomats, and Iraqi politicians, a place with menu so drastically different that it seems as if they were lifted whole from other countries and dropped in the center of Baghdad.

On Thursday, as part of the recent security agreement with the United States, the U.S.-square-mile Green Zone—or the International Zone—will revert to Iraqi control. The Iraqi will decide, with input from the American side, who gets which buildings, what parts should be opened up to the rest of Baghdad and who can go in and out.

Americans will even begin paying rent.

Several contractors have been set up operating in the Iraqi and American officials to easily and administer these matters, though it appears that little will be done immediately because of the enormous strides in security, the reality outside—in the Red Zone, as it soldiers call it, "on the economy"—is inching toward equilibrium with the reality inside, but it is not quite there yet.

So while Iraqi soldiers now stand at checkpoints, Americans are still searching their nearby and intelligence about a possible terrorist attack has made the checkpoints more stringent than usual this week, an Iraqi military spokesperson said.

Plans to shrink the zone in open major thoroughfares, which could go a long way toward reducing Baghdad's strangling traffic, are promised but could be months away.

Americans have been mowing out of Saddam-era stone 2006, though it has not been decided in many cases who is taking their palace.

No real estate transfer is as significant as that involving the Republican Palace, Saddam Hussein's lavish showplace, captured and occupied in April 2003 by American troops. It was home to the Coalition Provisional Authority and, later, the American Embassy.

The American diplomats have moved into the enormous yet modern new embassy nearby, but the decision on who gets the valuable palace is still under discussion. It will probably be Prime Minister Nouri Kamal al-Maliki, said several Iraqi officials. Dr Presidential Affairs Tariq Hashemi, said several others. Or both. AFP

"The role of the coalition forces (in the Green Zone) will be secondary, restricted to training Baghdad brigade troops in use equipment to detect explosives and advising Iraqi forces," Qasim Mousawi, spokesperson of Iraqi forces in Baghdad, said.

Iraqi forces take over control of the heart of US power in Iraq as US forces across the country prepare to operate in new context with local troops. While US soldiers remain under US command, US military operations are to be authorized starting Thursday by a joint US-Iraqi committee.

In Baghdad, US officials said they are ready to end the largest remaining US military presence in Iraq.

Iraqi forces take over a dramatically different Iraq from the one ravaged by sectarian violence in 2006 and 2007.

Attacks have dropped sharply thanks partly to a troop surge ordered by President George W. Bush in 2007 and also to new, found cooperation from Sunni Arab tribal leaders. Reuters

PHOTO taken in the '60s and released by the Cuban Council of State shows then Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro (left) as he talks during a meeting next to Argentine guerrilla leader Ernesto "Che" Guevara. —

Cuba marks 50 years of communism

By Sylvia Briand

HAVANA—CUBA ON THURSDAY celebrates the 50th anniversary of its revolution with its iconic leader Fidel Castro withdrawn from power, still at odds with the United States and facing new economic challenges.

Friday, new festivities, led by President Raul Castro, 77, who officially took over from his older brother in February, were due to center on Santiago de Cuba—the southeastern city from where the revolution began.

It was on that June 62-year-old Fidel, who has not appeared in public since undergoing major surgery almost two and a half years ago, would participate.

Leftist Bolivian President Evo Morales has pulled out of the party and it was also unclear whether Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who considers himself Fidel's "spiritual son," would attend.

"Celebrations won't be as grandiose as we had wished due to the economic situation," a Cuban official said.

A 22-year-old Fidel Castro announced the start of the revolution in the island's second city after the victory of a 25-month guerrilla war over dictator Fulgencio Batista.

The communist revolution—also led by legendary Argentine guerrilla Ernesto "Che" Guevara—took on Marxist overtones in May 1961, one month after the attempted invasion of the Bay of Pigs by CIA-backed Cuban exiles.

Former US president John F. Kennedy declared an embargo in February 1962, before the Soviet missile crisis, which almost set off a nuclear war.

US president-elect Barack Obama, due to take power on January 20, has, however, promised to soften the 46-year-old embargo, and Raul Castro has said he is ready for talks without "taboos or sticks" with Obama.

The Cuban president has also pardoned "structural enemies"—a departure from his older brother and leading members of the communist old guard.

The Cuban Communist Party is split between backers of the status quo who, like Fidel, refuse to loosen the regime's tight controls, and progressives pushing for a Chinese-style, controlled opening up of the economy.

But Raul's promised thaw has been taken a back seat to the global economic crisis as the president signaled in July, when he announced greater government control of resources and tighter management of agriculture.

"It's my duty to speak frankly because it would be unethical to create false expectations," he said after telling Cubans to expect tough economic times from spiraling international fuel and food prices.

On Saturday, the president called for new government spending cuts, but assured Cubans the economic and social reforms he had promised "have not been shelved."

The Caribbean island, also battered by three hurricanes in 2008, causing $10 billion in damage—equivalent to 20 percent of Cuba's gross national product—as forced measures to meet its debt repayments.

It is still officially in the Special Period in theorime, an extended period of economic crisis that began in 1991 after the collapse of its main backer, the Soviet Union.

Although the island of 11.2 million people has since found new partners, particularly oil-rich Venezuela, life remains difficult for most Cubans who earn an average of $20 per month and survive due to a parallel economy.

Dissident US puppets by Havana, Cuban dissidents, divided and without a leader, say there are 219 "political prisoners" on the island.

During his decades in power, Fidel Castro expropriated foreign companies, foiled his political enemies and threw some two million Cubans into exile.

But he also introduced historic reforms, including major education and health advancements that raised the island nation to the level of leading western countries. AFP

Former chair of dairy company pleads guilty in China milk scandal

BEIJING—THE CHAIR OF A CHINESE dairy company went on trial on Wednesday over a tainted milk scandal that has killed at least six children and made thousands ill.

Tian Wenhua, 66-year-old former general manager of the now-bankrupt Sanlu Group, pleaded guilty to charges of "producing and selling fake or substandard products", state-run Xinhua news agency said.

Tian appeared with three other company executives at a court in Shijiazhuang, capital of northern Hebei province. It was unclear whether they could face the death penalty.

"(Tian) may face a maximum penalty of death for producing and selling contaminated baby milk food, along with three of her senior managers at the Shijiazhuang Intermediate People's Court," the official China Daily said on Wednesday.

But the Xinhua report said the maximum sentence for the charges was life imprisonment.

Executives at Sanlu, partly owned by New Zealand's Fonterra group, failed to report cases of infants' children developing kidney stones and other complications from drinking milk adulterated with melamine by months before the scandal broke in September.

Melamine, an industrial compound used in making plastic chairs, counter-tops, plates, fertiliser and even explosives, has been added to food to cheat nutrition tests due to its high nitrogen content.

Another 13 people involved in producing, selling, buying and adding melamine to raw milk have gone on trial in the last week.

At least six children have died and more than 290,000 made ill from the contaminated milk, battering already devoted faith in China-made products and prompting massive recalls around the world.

Tian told the court on Wednesday the learned about the tainted milk complaints from consumers in mid-May, Xinhua quoted her as saying.

The company's net was a working team led by Tian to handle the case, but did not submit a written report about the milk powder to the Shijiazhuang city government until Aug. 2, Tian said.

The Shijiazhuang government did not report the case to higher government authorities until a month later, prompting speculation authorities sought to avoid a stained opening Beijing's Olympic Games in August.

China, seeking to restore battered credibility in its food, drugs and products, is likely to pass stiff sentences if the four are convicted.

Zhang Xiaoyu, former head of the food and drug watchdog, the State Food and Drug Administration, was executed last year for taking bribes and dereliction of duty in the wake of a series of drug safety scandals.

In the food sup in the high-profile tainted and other exported products that China has put a lid on the problem, fresh quality scares have surfaced.

The melamine scare has also prompted quality inspectors to use jobbiness. "Following reports that some products contained poisonous ingredients", Xinhua said on Wednesday in a separate report. Reuters

The WORLD

Julie Lavene B. Sierra

Israel, Hamas reject truce; blitz toll hits 400

GAZA CITY—THE NEW YEAR IN GAZA BEGAN on Thursday with air strikes as Israeli jets pounded Hamas targets for a sixth day, while the Islamists vowed to fight to the end and the death toll from the blitz hit 400.

Israeli warplanes carried out some 20 strikes in the battered enclave overnight, the army said, after the Jewish state's security cabinet rejected international proposals of a truce in one of its deadliest ever offensives on Gaza.

Jets pounded Hamas government buildings, rocket launching sites and tunnels used to smuggle in weapons and supplies into the territory that Israel has kept virtually sealed since the Islamists assumed power there in June 2007.

The death toll from "Operation Cast Lead," unleashed by Israel on Saturday in retaliation for ongoing rocket fire from the enclave, reached 400 with nearly 2,000 people wounded, the head of Gaza emergency services Moawiya Hassanein said.

The United Nations has said that at least 35 percent of those killed have been civilians.

Hamas vowed to fight "until the last breath" if Israel made good on threats to send ground troops into Gaza.

"We in Hamas are ready for all scenarios and we will fight until the last breath," senior official Mushir al-Masri said late Wednesday.

The Jewish state has been amassing tanks and personnel on the border of the territory with Defense Minister Ehud Barak reportedly warning of a ground assault to accompany the air raids.

In a defiant televised speech, the head of the Hamas government, Ismail Haniya, vowed to fight on and would be defeated.

"Our people will defeat them today," Haniya vowed in a defiant televised speech late Wednesday.

Despite international appeals for the bloodshed to end, Israel's security cabinet rejected proposals for a ceasefire on Wednesday with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert saying conditions were not yet ripe for one.

"We did not launch the Gaza operation only to end it with the same rocket firing that we had at its start," a senior official quoted Olmert as saying.

World leaders and diplomats continued to scramble to find a way to stop the operation that has sent anger spiraling in the Muslim world.

The UN Security Council began consultations on a draft resolution on the Gaza conflict proposed by Libya on behalf of a group of Arab countries, diplomats said.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy would travel to Egypt, Israel and the West Bank on Monday, his office announced. In a New Year's message, Sarkozy said he will visit the Middle East in a bid to "find a roadmap toward peace."

"The effort to bring about a ceasefire continues," US State Department spokesperson Gordon Duguid said.

The White House said it was up to Hamas to make the first move.

"I think President George W. Bush thinks that Hamas needs to stop firing rockets, and that is what will be the first steps in a ceasefire," White House spokesperson Gordon Johndroe said. AFP

A DEFIANT Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (left) introduces former Illinois Atty. Gen. Roland Burris as his choice to fill the US Senate seat vacated by President-elect Barack Obama on Dec. 31, 2008. AFP

High drama in Illinois over Obama Senate seat

CHICAGO—CRITICISM MAINLY drawn on embattled Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Wednesday for his defiance in appointing the state's new US senator but doubts persisted that anyone could block the move.

"It's off the rails. What else could be crazier?" said Richard Epstein, a constitutional law professor at the University of Chicago.

Blagojevich, who was arrested on Dec. 9, ignored warnings from within his own party on Tuesday by appointing a successor to fill President-elect Barack Obama's vacant Senate seat—the seat the governor has been charged by federal prosecutors with trying to sell to the highest bidder.

"Sense of Disbelief" read the headline in the Chicago Sun-Times over a full-page photograph of the governor with his choice for the Senate, Roland Burris, 71, the former Illinois attorney general, fellow Democrat and frequent candidate.

"Blagojevich has demonstrated he's totally unpredictable," said Mike Lawrence, who recently retired from the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University.

Obama has called for Illinois' embattled governor and fellow Democrats to block Burris from assuming office.

The governor sent a formal proclamation on the appointment to the US Senate on Wednesday. Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White refused to sign the document, which requires said couple could be more.

Late on Wednesday, Burris filed a request with the Illinois Supreme Court asking it to compel White to sign and affix the state seal to the proclamation, the court said in a statement without indicating when it might respond to the filing.

Blagojevich, who has denied the corruption charges, is facing impeachment in the Illinois legislature in the state capital of Springfield where hearings resume next month.

Blagojevich, a Democrat in his second term, has yet to be formally indicted. Prosecutors, who will unveil having rushed into charging him, on Wednesday asked the court for a 90-day extension to formally indict Blagojevich, who has been under investigation since his first term in 2003. Reuters

Russia prepares to shut off gas pipe to Ukraine; EU threatened

MOSCOW/KIEV—RUSSIA WAS PREPARING to cut off gas deliveries to neighboring Ukraine on Thursday, raising the specter of disruptions to European Union supplies, after overnight talks for 2009 broke down.

European countries were anxious to avoid a repeat of what happened in January 2006 when, during a similar row, Moscow cut off supplies to Ukraine, causing a fall in gas supplies passing via Ukraine to the rest of Europe.

Moscow said it will honor its warrants to supply European customers with gas, and those have enough reserves to manage without Russian supplies for days, but not weeks.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko also gave assurances to European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso that there would be no disruptions to supplies to the EU, the European Commission said in a brief statement.

Pipelines that cross Ukraine carry about one-fifth of the EU's gas needs. Ukraine said it has several weeks' domestic supply in storage, but a new cut-off could tarnish Russia's reputation as a reliable energy supplier and further undermine Ukraine's crisis-battered economy.

Alexei Miller, head of Russian gas giant Gazprom, said talks with Ukrainian officials had failed to settle a dispute over $2 billion in unpaid gas bills and the price at which Ukraine will buy Russian gas next year.

Gazprom had offered gas at $250 per 1,000 cubic meters, a steep rise from 2008's $179.50 but still around half the current European market price, albeit one that is set to fall sharply.

"From 10 a.m. on Jan. 1, Gazprom will completely, 100 percent, cease gas supplies to consumers in Ukraine," Miller told a news conference in Moscow late Wednesday.

Miller, a close ally of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, said Ukraine should take full responsibility for causing the crisis.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko and Tymoshenko urged Russia in a joint statement to continue talks without raising deliveries, the Interfax Ukraine agency reported on Thursday.

Russia says the cut-off does not apply to shipments to Europe, but there could be a knock-on effect if it causes a drop in pressure in the transit pipelines in Ukraine that flow to Europe to use them as a bargaining chip.

Germany's EON and BASF and Italy's ENI are among the biggest customers for Russian gas.

However, EU states are less vulnerable to supply disruptions than they were three years ago.

Economic recession and a cold start to winter have reduced demand and left enough heating fuel in Western European storage cellars to last a few days without much Russian gas, though analysts say a cut of more than a week would cause problems.

"Consumers [in Germany] won't see worry," a spokesperson for Germany's RWE energy and water association was quoted as saying by Der Spiegel's online edition. "The tanks are quite full."

Countries in eastern and central Europe are likely to feel any disruption first because they are closer to the potential bottleneck in Ukraine. Reuters

BERLIN'S NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY

FIREWORKS illuminate the Quadriga sculpture atop the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on Jan. 1. Around one million visitors streamed to the German capital's spectacular New Year's Eve party between the Brandenburg Gate and the Siegessaule. REUTERS

Avalanche survivor haunted by decision to leave friends

MONTREAL—ONE OF THREE survivors of a couple avalanches to traverse Canada said on Wednesday he was haunted by the "gut-wrenching decision" they made to leave eight friends behind, buried in the snow, while they went looking for help.

Jeff Adams, 28, was among 11 snowmobilers who were on a ride on Sunday in the Canadian Rocky Mountains in British Columbia, when an avalanche buried them alive. Adams and two friends freed themselves and got help, but not in time to save the other eight.

Seven bodies were recovered on Monday and that of Danny Bjarnason was found on Tuesday.

Jeff explained how he and another friend survivor were digging out a third friend when four other snowmobilers arrived to help.

"At approximately 2:05 p.m., we heard a crack and that's when the second slide hit us, burying all 11 of us," Adams told reporters.

He said the second avalanche, "hit us at 150 kilometers an hour plus ... the volume of snow was probably at least 4.5 meters high."

Bjarnason's sister Dee Dee Gunther, Adams said he managed to break out just as he was choking, and then helped dig out another of his friends.

Together, he added, they were digging out a third man when they heard the crack of another avalanche and abandoned their mate to run for their lives.

"And as we were running away from (cries he was saying, 'Don't leave me here, don't leave me here,' and we kept saying, we're sorry." AFP

Pakistan militants admit role in Mumbai siege

ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN—PAKistani authorities have obtained confessions from members of the Pakistani militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba that they were involved in the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November that killed more than 160 people, a Pakistani official said.

The confessions are sure to put pressure on Pakistan's leaders, as some Pakistani officials have repeatedly complained to senior media that India had not provided them evidence of Pakistani complicity.

American and British officials—and Indian investigators—have said for weeks that their intelligence clearly points to the involvement of Lashkar in the Mumbai attacks. That evidence has been deeply uncomfortable for Pakistan, whose premier spy agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence, helped create, finance and train Lashkar in the 1990s to fight a proxy war against Indian forces in the Indian-controlled portion of Kashmir.

But now, after weeks of obstructing, it also seems clear that Pakistan may use its leverage to make the case that the Mumbai attackers were not part of a conspiracy carried out with the ISI, but that the militants were operating on their own and outside the control of governments agents.

The most talkative of the seized Lashkar members having interrogated is said to be Zarrar Shah, the Pakistani official said. American intelligence officials say they believe that Shah, the militant group's communications chief, has served as a crucial conduit between Lashkar and the ISI. His close ties to the agency could box Pakistan out of involvement in the attacks are seen to be unsettling for the government and its spy agency.

An operational leader of Lashkar, Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, is also said to be cooperating with investigators. News of Shah's confession was reported by The Wall Street Journal.

"These guys showed us no mercy," said the Pakistani official. "They were bragging. They didn't need to be pushed, tortured or waterboarded" into making their statements.

The confessions made no mention of any involvement by the Pakistani government, said the official. "They talk about people acting on their own," he said.

Though Pakistani authorities announced that the men had been detained in the first week of December, the official declined to say how long it took for them to confess their role in the Mumbai siege. AFP

A MEMBER of the Jewish community cries for those killed in Mumbai in photo taken on Dec. 1, 2008.

LIFESTYLE Fashion & Beauty

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and Ria Francisco-Prince

'08 local shopping defies gloomy global trend

By Cheche V. Maral

THE AX MAY HAVE fallen on Wall Street in 2008, but not on Philippine retail, if you ask local retail executives.

If you're among those who parked their plastic cards and entered most of the malls and department stores following the global financial crisis, you would probably be crunching your head as retailers claim there didn't feel the pinch. Not at all, they say. In fact they posted growth—double-digit growth—in '08.

Retail giant SM Shoemart, according to Jorge Shinkilda, senior vice president for retail, registered double-digit growth in sales in "October and November, which were the months when the crisis unfolded in a big way."

The same seems to have been the case in the local luxury market. "Our sales have been rolling over the past couple of months since this thing started," Arnott Huang said in an interview in early November. Huang is executive vice president of Rustan Specialties Inc. (RSI) and its mother company, Rustan Group of Companies.

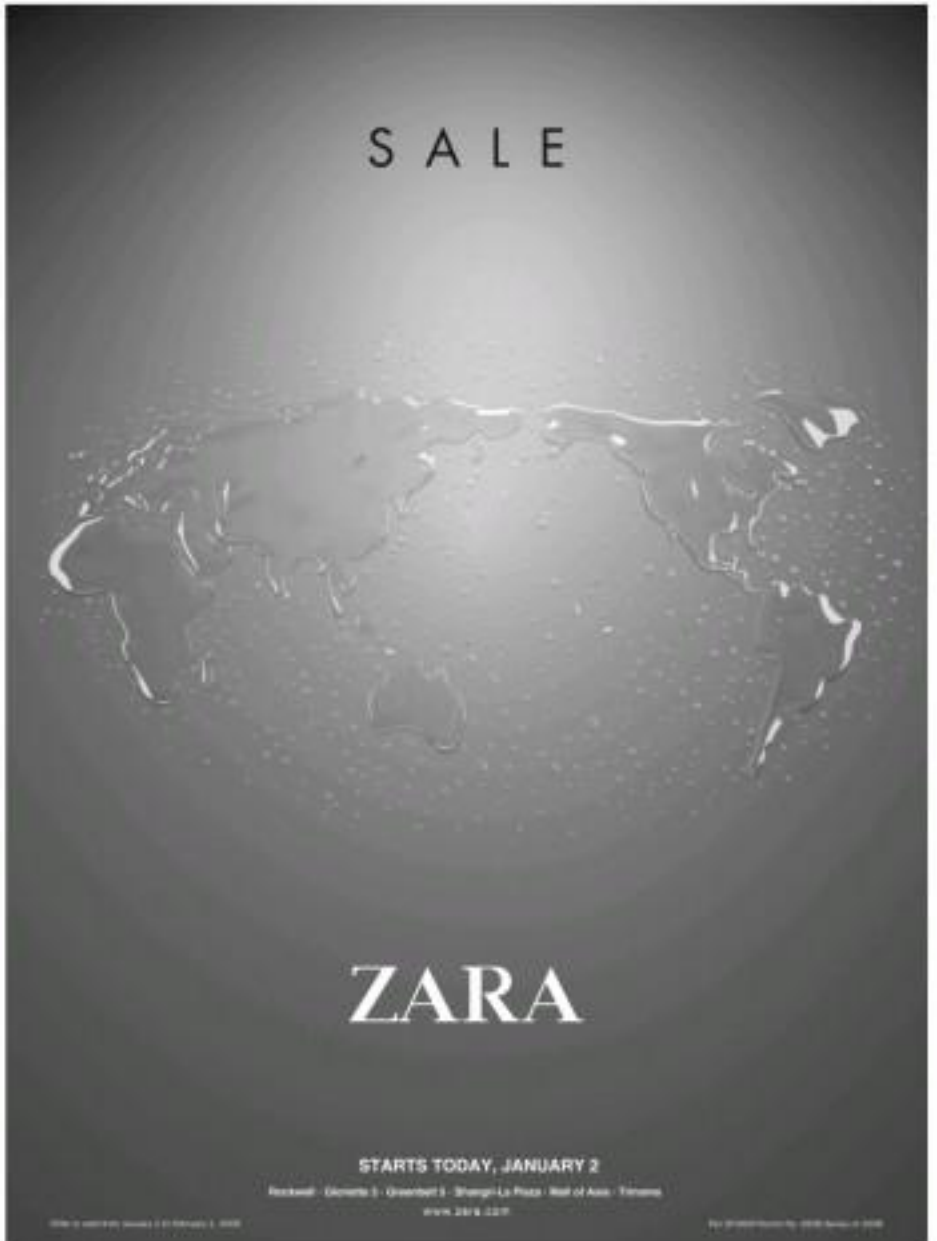
RSI distributes global luxury labels such as Prada, Gucci, Burberry, Dolce & Gabbana, Ermenegildo Zegna, as well as mid-market brands like Zara, Marks & Spencer and Lacoste.

The two years following the recession in 1997, Huang recalled having had the "best years" for RSI. "We're hoping that will remain the case.... This one is much bigger than that and we're aware of that. We're banking on the fact that the local luxury market will be traveling less and shopping more here."

Rustan's posted a 15 percent growth in sales in the months of September and October, "even since the changes," Huang said referring to incremental computations in the

(SEE PAGE 4)

Retail heads are singing a different tune from the rest of the world—so far



Wayfarers still the way to go in 2009

RECTANGULAR plastic frame

AVIATOR

It's hard to beat a classic

SUNGLASS SHAPES AND STYLES FOR MEN IN past seasons have run the gamut from sporty wraparounds to futuristic face-hugging styles, angular designs to oversized dark eye saucers.

Still, it's hard to beat a classic. Time-tested styles keep coming back, if with a few modern tweaks.

Aviator frames made a big comeback in 2007, and wayfarer shades, the signature eyephone worn by icons like Tom Cruise and Bob Dylan, took the spotlight once again this year, in several color incarnations.

So what's the outlook for men's optics in 2009?

We'll still be seeing a lot of the classic wayfarer shape, but with a few fine-tuned details such as double bridges and bright colors.

When choosing styles, remember that the color and shape of the frame you choose should depend not only on your personal style and preference, but how well the frame goes your face.

SEER glasses

VISE frame

If a frame is too large, or does not fit properly, it can often be adjusted. Metal frames can be bent slightly and screws tightened on the hinges, while plastic frames can be heated and reformed for better fit.

Wear shades, the brighter today's brights.

Email the author at gbakken@inquirer.com.ph

WRAPAROUND

Your guide to small stores with big offerings

YODA chair

HOT UBLF FUSH! See all brand new

By Jules Ramirez
Contributor

SOMEWHERE IN DASIG along C5, a gem-of-a-shopping experience is waiting to be discovered: Tiendesitas. Opened in 2004, the place is inspired by Asian design. Yet it's very Filipino, as evident in the horse-drawn calesas.

"Tiendesitas" is a Spanish word for small stores, and in here, one will discover small air-conditioned stores with big offerings. Big pavilions divided into villages, the place is claiming to be the biggest in Asia. For those who have been to the maddening experience called Chatuchak Weekend Market in Bangkok, Tiendesitas is somewhat similar, minus the crowd and the heat. For the place is fully covered with roofs above.

One can start by visiting the Fashion Village, where new and some of stores sell repair services, as well as local brands such as Kimco & Co. and imported items from China and Thailand.

The salespersons gladiator sandals abound in some of the shops, and one should think twice about buying them due to overkill. I was able to buy top for kids shirts at P150 each, and I must admit that I am one of the few who always buy shirts and jeans in kiddie size. I am blessed with small shoulders and hips, size for age 10 fits me well. For those thinking of doing good due Christmas, look for Payatas' ESLOS Cooperative Booth. One may buy bags, sandals and other items made from recycled foil packaging by the ladies of Payatas.

Pet world

Next stop is the Pet Village. Tiendesitas' version of Cactmar, only better. Stores selling mostly canines abound, with various breeds such as Labradors, Jack Russels, French bulldogs, dwarfs, poodles. Name the breed, and most likely, it is available in Pet Village. The malls also offer grooming services and one can spend the time shopping around while pet dogs are being groomed.

The place also has pet supplies, from leashes to shampoos, dog biscuits and toys. Pet beds with designer logos, although not authentic, will look good side by side with human companion's bed inside one's bedroom.

In case hunger pangs hit shoppers, nothing to worry, for Tiendesitas has some of the best food stalls around, offering mostly Filipino fare. Think Herong Filipino of yesteryears, the Food Pavilion has a very festive ambiance, complete with colorful furnings. Beside the Food Pavilion is the Delicacies Village, selling Filipino pasalubongs and fruits.

Furniture

For those hunting for good furniture, Tiendesitas has a one-stop Furniture Village. In here, one can find offerings as far as Vigan and Cebu. Big ceramic Chinese jars, storage-looking wooden pieces, chandeliers, name it, and it is being sold here.

Tiendesitas has been compared with Bangkok's Chatuchak weekend market, minus the crowd and the heat

HOME Furnishings Village

Thought a Brunello Cucinelli's \$600 cotton chair knock off for less than the price of the internationally-acclaimed furniture maker is offering, quite a steal, considering that his furniture are owned by Hollywood A-listers such as Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt.

Tiendesitas' Furniture Village is like putting Bangkok, Explore Ayuthi and Rattanang in a single space, plus more.

The Clubhouse. Tiendesitas has a Bangkok Midnight Market, running until Jan. 4. The shops start from the Novelties Village all way to the other end of Tiendesitas, imagine a block of Bangkok shopping. One can buy gift items as low as P50 for a trinket or P300 for a brand-new shirt. The ethnic office Hercules prices without the crowd, and in a very comfortable sense.

One need not to worry about grandparents since due to the absence of heavy shopping, one can truly shop in a relaxed manner. And I must say that the items being sold in some of the shops are really of novelty appreciation. The shoppers are mostly from the gated villages of the Valle Verde area.

So, Christmas day gets unseen, finish your shopping list for gifts in style. Tiendesitas offers comfort in a single roof; minus the hassles, including parking, for the place offers ample parking spaces. For the really serious fiery, there is nothing much one can do except to take advantage of the lulls between rush hours.

A REVITALIZED Rustan's has improved its visual merchandising and product offerings.

A SECTION of the sparkling new SM City North Edsa Annex. It's the world's third biggest mall.

ROBINA Gokongwei-Pe with Claire Zobel

Mall chain opens in Cabanatuan

ROBINSONS DEPARTMENT STORE recently opened its newest branch at levels 2 and 3 of Robinsons Cabanatuan located at NS Pacific Mall, Maharlika Highway, Cabanatuan City.

Leading the inaugural rites and ceremonial ribbon cutting ceremonies was RDC celebrity endorser Sarah Zobel. Gobernlle followed the welcome remarks given by Cabanatuan Mayor Alvin Vergara and Vice Gov. Edward Joson.

Cabanatuan folk braved the long queue for a photo op with Zobel and Camille, which also entertained the crowd with an earlier concert.

Shoppers got to bring home free gifts with every P500 worth of purchase. Others won applause in the lovely lucky loot prizes.

CABANATUAN Vice Gov. Edward Joson

CABANATUAN Mayor Alvin Vergara

'08 local shopping. . .

From page C1

family-owned company. Huang's mother, Zenaida Tanseco, took over.

"When we speak of crisis, however, we think that it is two other crises—the rice shortage and the fuel crisis... that had more impact on the Philippines," said Mendiola. "With the rice shortage addressed and fuel prices lower, there have more or less been contained."

In what seems to be an understandable move in times of crisis, SM and SSI are expanding, not opening more—and grander—stores in a big way.

Last month, SSI unveiled the extension of its mall in North Edsa, once the world's third biggest mall. (The country has three of the world's biggest malls, all of them an SM.)

Early this year, SSI brought in iconic American brands Gap and Banana Republic. Next year, it will open stores for mid-market apparel brands like Mandaluyong Outlet and Singapore's Stanzi in Greenbelt 5, and the French accessories label called Agatha Moire (again), it will launch the stores of Jimmy Choo and Hermes in Greenbelt 4.

Optimistic, too

It has also been an optimistic time at Greenhills Department Store, another family-owned enterprise.

"We remodel, sales [were] up, both in home and apparel sections," said general manager Xandra Ramos-Padilla. "People are shopping locally. We're in a very good position to address the needs of people in this economically trying times."

Like other retailers here and abroad, Greenhills' holiday sales to lure customers, understanding that no matter the economic situation, the Filipino wouldn't cut down his or her Christmas list.

Ramos-Padilla said, "I can't speak for the rest. But in the US, it's the luxury market that's suffering."

That depends on who you ask, of course. According to Huang, "It's a mixed bag in the US, the mid-priced brands are suffering. If you talk to the luxury brands, there's not seeing double-digit [growth] but they're still growing. It's not that they're unaffected. They are, but not negative figures like the other [mid-market] brands."

However, Ruby Tan of the boutiques Myth and Soho, said, "the high dies me but right now is artificial because of the holiday shopping. I expect a very slow first quarter of 2009." Sales picked up in November, she admitted, but this may only be prompted by the holiday buying mood.

Her sentiment was echoed by Myth partner and fellow designer Purple Ong, who grimaced when asked in early December how sales was in the upscale Greenbelt 5.

But she's not too deterred. "We just have to persist and be pro-active," Ong said. "Life doesn't stop just because things have gone bad. We just have to learn to ride the waves."

At Rustan's, Huang said shoppers and personal customers have been selling particularly well, perhaps proving that if a woman can't buy the Chanel bag, she would settle for the lipstick. Or maybe she dies cream or the sunglasses.

"Whether to good or bad times, we try to give our customers an exciting one-stop shopping experience through our store in interiors, value-added services and value-for-money proposition," Mendiola said.

With a report from Abe U. Pangan

THE PHILIPPINES has three of the world's 10 biggest malls, all of them in SM. Above is the new SM City North Edsa Annex.

'Tease shirts'

FUSED SHIRTS USE ingeniously mock straps, rivets and smart edging.

Fused has unveiled a limited collection of edgy T-shirts designed that give chaste streetwear a twist.

Its tee statements here, just the right dose of thought-provoking words and symbols that spell radical chic. Prices range from five digital art, a good sprinkling of images from the '80s, a little primitivism, black, white and grey photo images and good old-fashioned stripes.

To come out with a real "tease shirt," Fused enlisted Lyzza na pareside just the right amount of rawness for that sexy retro look.

Fused, named after the movement (including jeans, jackets, cologne and other accessories) at its first shoot set here located in Market! Market! in Fort Bonifacio, CyberMall in Eastwood City Libis, Robinson's Galleria and St. Francis Square in Ortigas Center and SM City Bicutan.

STYLISH MEN'S TEES

I'M believes that style becomes ageless only when it brings out your own brand of personality. It is I'M Department Store's current pride in the men's department. Sure-prepared-looking tees provide an answer too—rustic, rugged, salvaged-yet stylish just like the I'M style here starts by spokesperson Ian Quiday Concepcion.

Zunic Success Story:

From size XL to medium

Featuring Ray A. Gapuz

The Discovery of Zunic's Safe, Painless, and Scientifically-Based Treatments

Fast forward to November 2008. Ray comes across a newspaper article about Zunic, a new slimming facility which presented a safer, painless, and easier alternative to losing weight. He reads on, and is excited to learn that the methods and technologies employed by Zunic are based on scientific research done by reputable international institutions. Being a Psychiatric Nursing Major with an M.A. in Nursing plus an INCLEX U.S. RN certification to boot, he was thrilled to know that Zunic incorporated medically-sound processes in their methodology. He admits, "With my medical field background, it was quite reassuring and comforting to see a slimming facility that was scientifically credible. I knew I had to give Zunic a try."

He immediately set a consultation session with Zunic's Makati Center and after meeting with licensed medical staff to discuss his own personalized program, he acknowledged his first treatment right away.

Presenting The New Ray A. Gapuz: After 11½ months with Zunic

Ten years into his battle with the bulge, this time, Ray was finally determined to shed off the extra weight. With the assurance that his treatments required no strenuous physical effort but would produce visible results in as little as 45 minutes, and that all procedures were safe, non-invasive, and virtually painless, he made a commitment to never miss a session. Ray vigilantly underwent a personalized combined regimen of Cavitation, Cellulite Zapper, Body Toning, Cellulite Zapper, Pulsed Laser Therapy, and Cellulite Zapper, all in the span of 12 weeks (also, he had lost 32 pounds and was sporting a fabulous 32-inch waistline.

"Imagine the delight and surprise of my students, family and friends! Some colleagues couldn't believe that I lost so much weight without going under the knife and were convinced that I had liposuction. Short of taking my shirt off to prove them that I had no surgical scars whatsoever, I just waved them off and proudly said that this body was by Zunic!" laughs Ray. "As I recommended Zunic to all those non-believers as they could see for themselves."

But above all, I, myself, was amazed. Zunic was able to fulfill everything they promised. Many weight-loss goals were conquered within the timeline I specified. I felt absolutely no pain during my treatments, and every time my sessions were over, I lost around 2"-3" cm around my waist. Believe me, I measured it each time, and the results were immediately felt and seen. I always left Zunic feeling very good about myself."

Truth enough, everyone who has recently seen Ray A. Gapuz cannot help but comment on his complete transformation. From his original XL-sized 196-pound frame and 40-inch waistline, Ray lost a total of 33 pounds and 11 inches around his waist, and is now back within his normal BMI range of 143 pounds, and size Medium, pero size 30. Six personal assists at Zunic achieved for Ray what ten years of traditional weight loss methods could not. No more urban Ray without tops into his favorite din's store, whatever clothing he selects is his doing will fit. After all, from no need to find a fitting size 12-14 shirts, he is now a slim and sexy size 3. And all this, thanks to Zunic.

Visit Zunic today, and try their four treatments for a free, confidential consultation. Zunic is open from 8 am to 8 pm, Monday to Sunday.

MAKATI 752-0680 or 752-0681
(G/F Somerset Olympia, Makati Avenue, Makati)

QUEZON CITY 374-0600 or 374-0630
(G/F Pioneerhouse Building, Timog Avenue, Quezon City)

ALABANG 771-2200 or 771-0000
(G/F Crowne Hotel, Bridgeway Avenue, Alabang)

ORTIGAS 706-0680 or 706-0690
(G/F AIC Burgundy Empire Tower, ADB Avenue, Ortigas Center)

Zunic
slimming & body sculpting
www.zunic.com.ph

Designer trees for your holiday hangover

JEWELRY designer Ana Rocha found wire ornaments and flowers, glued them with faceted plastic red stones.

DESIGNER Cesar Gaupo gave traditional with a white Christmas tree an A to A desired with white poinsettias and lanterns.

By Margo Enriquez
Contributor

HAVE A HOLIday hangover? You can still relish the glamour and style of the season just past by checking out the gallery of Greenbelt 5 to see how the fashion designers used their signature elements to adorn pine trees.

In keeping with the times, they used scraps from their archives and mixed them with existing Christmas decor.

For instance, Patchie Ramos' wintry Christmas theme used swags of delicate lace. Lyle Yap-Gan reclaimed knit yarns for balls, while Kate Torralba played up colorful bows and little dolls.

ACCESSORIES designer Anna Paja gathered about nineteen angels, bells and other bags to convey festive theme.

KNOW Who: An minimalist coloring, Ms. Barbie coconut styrofoam balls with scraps of black-and-white prints — dots, stripes, and flowers.

MAGIC Ortiz and Bodic went bayaw with coils of wire and dried anise.

BIG DESIGNER Annie Arenas hung prototypes of her crossing pouchettes that show artistry in beadwork.

STICKING to a black, white and watercolor scheme, Choc Bellgosa glued fabric belt loops, ribbons to and silver loops to styrofoam balls.

LIFESTYLE Fashion&Beauty

5 easy beauty resolutions to consider

Use SPF everyday—even at home or when going to the mall

KNOCKOUT!

Ria Francisco-Poleio

PEARLY GIRL follows through with New Year's resolutions? I'd bet our mom-five percent of those who make them—through it's true the New Year doesn't feel complete without at least having one.

That's why for people like me who have a hard time even remembering what I've resolved to do at the beginning of the year, the resolution has to be easy. I have to remember to print it and stick it to my mirror as a reminder.

To be more realistic, I've resolved to do just one of these five easy rules:

1. Use SPF every day....Even at home or when going to the mall. This sounds really easy, but sometimes we forget to protect our skin, especially if we are just staying indoors. The easiest way to do this is to go for products like sunscreen that already have SPF, so you won't really be adding to your routine but just making it work better for you. There are many good products out there that have SPF: Try Olay Total Effects.

OLAY Total Effects Daily Moisturizer

SETTING time for one's self is a good way to de-stress.

2. Find the clay with a clean face. Going off with makeup can potentially cause breakouts. Using a facial scrub is not enough. A clean face means no trace of mascara left. Mascara is a one of the hardest products to remove, followed by eyeliner. They're also in the eye area, so removing them is a particularly tricky task since the skin around our eyes is seven times more delicate than the skin on our face. Getting rid of gunk does take time and extra-loving care. Try Elm Cleanser cleansing oil.

3. Pamper yourself. It is good to set a time with yourself at least once a month. Go to the spa to get a massage, or a salon to have your hair treated. Setting time for one's self is a good way to de-stress. It can be as simple as locking yourself up in the rest room with your favorite publican and applying mask on your face.

4. Visit the dentist and the dentist. It is good to have our teeth cleaned or checked every six months. Dentist should also be able to update us on the newest innovations such as tooth-whitening treatments, which can give us more confident smiles. Try The Dental Place (tel. 8328971). Also, regular visits to the doctor would ensure that we are in healthy, tiptop shape always.

5. Remember our hands and feet. Our nails should see keep moisturizing our hands and feet.—they do not fit the ravages of aging—but we should also keep them clean at all times. Never leave nail polish on for more than five days. And when using dark polish, apply a colorless base to avoid staining.

Happy New Year!

DAILY CROSSWORD

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCES DRAKE

CONCEPTS SU DOKU

Concepts Sudoku

By Dave Green

		7	8		5	9		
		5		9		1		
3								6
8								1
	3						6	
2								4
6								8
		2		5		6		
		4	2		1	7		

Difficulty Level ★★★★

HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.

Tips and programs at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

8	4	1	3	5	7	6	9	2
9	6	2	8	1	4	3	5	7
3	5	7	6	9	2	8	1	4
4	7	6	9	3	1	5	2	8
5	1	8	2	4	6	9	7	3
2	3	9	5	7	8	1	4	6
7	9	5	4	6	3	2	8	1
1	8	4	7	2	5	7	3	9
6	2	3	1	8	9	4	6	5

Women of confidence and élan

KC CONCEPCION

HOLLYWOOD ICON BROOKE Shields, international queen Thalia, Philippine divas Sharon Cuneta and KC Concepcion, and screen, model and Asian Games gold medalist Hidilyn Diaz-Jaworski are Fullerlife Divas Selling's "Women of Confidence," the faces of one of the top direct-selling company's new exciting products.

According to Percy Mogpo, president of Fullerlife Divas Selling, the four women embody strong-willed and determined to be their own person while remaining beautiful and elegant all throughout. The Fullerlife products they represent complement these qualities and promise to enrich and enhance women's lives."

Shields is one of the most photographed faces in the world and an icon of timeless culture for. She was also tapped by Tupperware Brands Corp. to be its spokeswoman for its Chain of Confidence campaign, which encourages women to celebrate the bonds of female friendships and the confidence derived from those relationships.

Perfectly embodying her confidence, beauty, and grace is Tupperware's finalist, since Lilet, a new collection of simple yet smart lifestyle products inspired by Brooke Shields.

Thalia quickly became an international star as a telenovela queen to numerous Mexican soap operas. Behind the camera, she's also a successful businesswoman with her own clothing, fragrances and chocolate line, and is a loving wife to music mogul Tommy Mottola and darling mom to daughter Sabrina. Complementing her acumen of the world of labor is Thalia Sodi, her very own signature fragrance.

Philippine diva Sharon Cuneta also found a reunion of confidence in Concepcion, undoubtedly today's hottest young star. Concepcion oozes with charm, beauty and talent, which captivated the hearts of moviegoers in her first movie, "For The First Time."

Besides her three hit movies, she's also an active supporter of children's causes. She is the National Ambassador of the UN's World Food Programme.

Despite her busy schedule, Concepcion manages to look beautiful with Colour Collection's wide range of makeup essentials which come in various shades. And now with the new Colour Collection Long-Wearing Lipstick, expect Concepcion to look even more gorgeous from day to night.

Completing the roster of Women of Confidence is Aurora, who's now enjoying life with husband Representative Didon Jaworski and sons Robbie, Rafael Rotzo.

Besides attending to her family's needs, she manages to have time for her advocacy work for Gawad Kalinga and AsinPH and even exists everyday to maintain her riding skills.

While doing all these, she maintains her youthful glow, thanks to Nelsons Anti-Wrinkle Face Cream, a breakthrough anti-aging product that effectively fights wrinkles and delivers instant results in as fast as six hours.

Fullerlife Divas Selling is the authorized distributor of some of the world's premium brands including Tupperware, Colour Collection, Ecosa, Georgie On Ice, Vit Weiss, Nelsons, Neurametrix, Revival, Playtex, Hanes, Champion and Wonderbra.

Call the toll free number 1-800-10 FULLER1 (1-800-10-3855371).

Romance in a bottle

NEW YORK—WHEN IT COMES to eye-catching accessories, I don't discriminate between costume jewellery and real gems.

In fact, the ratio of adults on my dresser is 15 to 1—as in chunky glass cocktail rings and shiny enameled beads are somehow the defense tactics. My go-to "diamond studs" are actually cubic zirconia (CZ).

The same goes for my beauty indulgences. Drugstore finds passionfully coexist with department store treasures.

Run every now and then, certain products catch my attention and merit a little shelling out of extra hard-earned cash. There's Guerlain's covetable cosmetics and fragrances, Clarins' tried-and-tested skincare line, Diptyque's aromatherapy candles and so forth.

Recently added to this list is Ralph Lauren's Romance Always Yours, the latest fragrance celebrating the 10th year anniversary of the original Romance.

Mariel Chua, Beauty in the Big Apple

I was initially blown away by the packaging of the Limited Edition Parfum, which literally took a cigarette lighter cap off a glass bottle filled with Evergreen notes of freesia, ginger and fresh dazzling musks intoxicatingly with hints of patchouli, creamy musk and oak moss.

Further studying the literature, I discovered that the latest take on the 10-year-old bestseller was actually conceived by Harry Fremont, the visionary genius responsible for treasures like CK One, Armani Aqua, Kenneth Cole Black and Lauder Mendez—scents I've all appreciated to one point or another.

Added what sets apart the update from the original, Fremont says, "Romance is a classic transparent floral, while Always Yours is a sophisticated oriental chypre.

By elaborating the original Emily elements of the fragrance, Always Yours creates a more refined, elegant wearable—less in the complex, finely crafted signature of Romance. The dry down (all sensual musk, patchouli and oak moss) gives it a deep, rich chypre impression."

He adds, "Some Romance fans of 15 years ago feel they have outgrown the fragrance. The juice reminds them of a former boyfriend, their junior prom or college, or a relative who first gave them the gift of Romance. Always Yours gives these former Romance lovers a new, complex juice to mix to her next phase of life."

And as for the fancy packaging, the handcrafted glass decoder and "distressed" is "a modern symbol of romantic mood and love-an intimate gift for 10 years of marriage," according to the brand's press release.

Now I seriously plan on gifting myself with one of these. It's a good thing it's the holiday season. Merry Christmas, everyone!

Mariel Chua is the former beauty editor of Cosmopolitan, Seventeen and Oh! Magazine. She is now based in New York City. Visit flyMissesPlus.com.

TREAT yourself to a real beauty sparkler!

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX ESPINOSA

New contact lenses enhance your eye color

FRESHLOOK One Day contact lens in Green.

FRESHLOOK Colorblends contact lens in Honey

SUBTLE yet glowing new color

ALL NATURAL with FreshLook Colorblends in Amethyst

WITH FRESHLOOK'S contact lens, achieve a new look.

With FreshLook Colors, a bold eye color is achieved while with FreshLook Radiance, a pearlescent effect adds depth and sparkle to your natural eye color.

For that natural effect, go for FreshLook Colorblends, which creates subtle eye color change through the brand's unique 3-in-1 technology.

These specially patterned lenses blend well with the eyes for a subtle yet glowing new color. The colors available are blue, honey green, gray, hazel, turquoise, amethyst, true sapphire and purple.

The brand also has a new line of disposable lenses. FreshLook One-Day Multi Pack for Every Mood's also provides the eyes from the harmful UV rays.

FRESHLOOK One Day lenses in Pure Hazel

Two awards for leading footwear brand

ADIDAS Response Cushion 17

ADIDAS, THE LEADING manufacturer of sporting goods and apparel, was recently recognized by the world's leading running magazine, Runner's World, with two awards at its yearend summit in New York.

The Supernova Cushion 7 was awarded the most-coveted Best Update award. This running shoe offers greater comfort and breathability with even less weight than before. It has No Sore engineered mesh upper and compression molded EVA midsole for lightweight and comfortable running.

Adiprene in the forefoot maximizes propulsion and efficiency, while the full-length Torsion system for midfoot support.

The Response Cushion 17 won the Readers Choice Best Design award after receiving over 4,200 votes from Runner's World readers worldwide.

With its stylish silver and white upper and classic black three stripes, the Response Cushion 17 boasts of 2 D PerMotion, which allows the shoe to adapt to the ground for improved handling and stability during high-speed maneuvering.

Just like the Supernova Cushion 7, the Response Cushion 17 has Adiprene cushioning for a comfortable and fashionable run. Adiprene outsole and ground adaptive heel unit, and Torsion System for midfoot integrity.

Visit www.adidas.com/Running.

ADIDAS Supernova Cushion 7

Cosmetic surgery—with a little help from one's own fats

By Margo C. Enriquez
Contributor

WHAT DO EYEBAGS AND Christmas decor have in common?

They're both called "kentsura," because they form a curve between two points. While decorative kentsura brighten up a place, the fat pads in the eyebags weigh down the face, giving off that world-weary look.

The usual resource is to undergo lower lid blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery), which removes the excess fat and redundant skin.

As eyelid surgery and nose jobs are the most popular procedures in the country, Dr. Rene del Castillo Valerio espouses the use of the individual's tissues to improve his or her looks. Dubbed as head of the reconstructive and aesthetic surgery department of St. Luke's Hospital and the cosmetic surgery of Beverly Hills 0750 Multi-Specialty Institute.

Relocating fat

He points out that autologous fat transfer will be a major cosmetic surgery trend. This is a technique in which a person's own fat is used to plump up sunken or uneven parts of the face or breast measurements where desired, such as the breasts.

It's cost-effective because it comes with liposuction, where fat is sapped from unwanted parts and then pumped into areas which need perking up.

Fat transfer has become a preferred method of facial volume enhancement for patients who are sensitive to traditional dermal fillers such as restylane or collagen. After liposuction, the excess fat is processed and then injected into the deep lines and wrinkles, depressions under the cheeks or thin lips, for a fuller look.

BEFORE and after photos of liposuced eyebags, remedied by repositioning the fat for a smoother facial contour.

FAT TRANSFER rejuvenates the face by putting more volume in given areas.

One advantage of volume enhancement using fat injection is that there is no chance of allergic reaction since it comes from the patient's body.

Valerio says that in conventional eyelid surgery the removal of the fat pads usually in hollowness under the eyes. Ironically, this method of rejuvenation still makes the individual look older. On the other hand, relocating the fat to the tear trough (the area that covers the upper socket of the eye or where you apply under-eye cream and concealer) gives a more pleasing contour to the eyelid, and consequently a well-rested look.

Breast uplift

Valerio has also been substituting the patient's fats for implant augmentation—mammoplasty. Fat grafting to the breast is an alternative treatment for such concerns as abnormally small breasts, droopy breasts due to aging or childbirth, and asymmetric breasts (one breast is smaller than the other).

The process consists of incision in periareolar in places where there is excess fat. In Filipinos, it's normally the groin or lower abdomen and the thighs or saddlebags. The fat is aggregated and cleansed, then placed in a syringe and injected into the breast.

"I inject about 150 to 200 cc of pure fat for each side of the breast. For every 200 cc of fat, as a rule, you gain a cup size more. The surgery takes about two hours. The recovery is faster—about two or three weeks. You wear an elastic garment support over the area where the fat was harvested and in the breasts. The support is worn for four weeks. It will have to be removed after three to six months, until you reach the desired cup size," explains Valerio.

He estimates it would take two more procedures get a C-cup from an A-size. "You can only inject 200 cc of fat at a given time. The fat is reservoir, otherwise it will liquefy."

This procedure is still in its infancy stage in the country; awareness, studying results of fat transfer to breasts will have to be addressed. Shorter-term initial results have been noted, more natural-looking breasts; though the repeated touch-ups may seem time-consuming compared to implants, which are replaced every 10 years.

Liposuction are still preferred by women. Now on its sixth generation, the USFDA-approved gel implant costs around P57,000 a piece and won't leak or shrink. However, Valerio cites the drawbacks of implant augmentation, such as breast hardening or capsular contraction, implant deflation, and infection.

"You're talking about a foreign body versus your own tissues. Choose between the two," he says.

Nose lifts

Even in nose lifts, Valerio has been a proponent of using the patient's own tissues instead of implants. In rhinoplasty, he uses the patient's cartilage taken from the back of the ear, which regenerates after a month.

"Traditionally, we used silicon or Gortex implants, which are synthetic cosmetics, to augment the bridge of the nose. By using the cranial [removal ear] cartilage, you avoid complications like the rejection of the implant. There's also faster recovery."

Most of times, Valerio handles an either opposite of hundred surgeries or person who want to feel more secure about their looks.

Still, a rare client in his heart is that of Iza Calzado, an indigent patient who expressed her desire to look normal in the TV show "Wish Ko Lang." She was born with hemangioma, a tissue in the blood vessel. Surgery was done on a young age using dye or dry ice therapy.

Although she was healed, the cryo surgery brought about defective skin growth, noticeably in her cheek. The vestiges of the procedure made her look unnatural.

Valerio plumped up Calzadilla's face by reconfiguring he eyes' the cheeks, jawline, nose, chin and lower eyelid. The Nigerian research assist beyond her physical transformation. It restored her confidence.

"Her eyes are now happy," he says with a smile.

DR. RENE Valerio was trained in Russia and the United States.

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From plain Jane to sexy siren

MISS UGLY winner

LOU VICTORIOSO's Transformation

COSMETIC SURGERY IS flourishing even in tough economic times. In a society where physical appearance is synonymous with self-worth, people will pay the price to feel good about themselves.

Although a plastic surgeon's criteria for beauty is based on physical indicators such as symmetry and proportion, St. Luke's Dr. Rene Valerio still believes in the classic precept.

"To me, beauty is still in the eye of the beholder," he says.

Still due to the young models, Lou Victorioso, winner of "Miss Ugly No More," a contest sponsored by Beverly Hills 0750 Multi-Specialty Institute.

Valerio led the team of specialists who did Victorioso's makeover. Her flaws were pretty much fat deposits on the cheeks. Her style did also have a receding chin, it was a double chin as well. Her nose had an underdeveloped bridge that ended with a rounded tip and flared to the side.

She says "fat-cheated [on hormone-heavy, emphasized by the hanging abdomen. After childbirth, the abdominal skin was slack, with stretch marks present. Her thighs had fat deposits in the outer and inner areas.

"We did a team job, contoured the chin and nose, reduced it with implants, sculpted the cheekbones, reshaped her face and performed breast augmentation. Now she has a flat stomach and contoured hips and thighs," says Valerio.

The surgery was enhanced by non-surgical services to improve her skin type, cosmetic dentistry and weight management for maintenance.

In the hands of skilled doctors, a puffball was transformed into a beautiful swan. Victorioso became a centerfold for HMM and has since migrated.

Asked about the life-changing impact of breast augmentation, Valerio weighed pre and post-surgery photos comparing a client to the as an iron board and a luscious pair of mammaries which looked like a DD (as to double double)-cup after a procedure.

The satisfaction rate among patients is more than 90 percent, he claims.

"You with their partners to counsel by almost 90 percent. Some wives were not even planning to have children, but they got pregnant."

But can cosmetic surgery bring back straying partners?

"I don't know about that. My concern is to fulfill the wishes of the patient. If the patient wants surgery to satisfy the desire of the husband or to bring back a straying husband, I won't do the surgery on all. The motivation is not for themselves, it's for other people. It's not a realistic expectation. What if, despite the breast enlargement, he won't come back or he still likes the younger person? Baka ako pa ang sisihin [I might be blamed]," he says. Margo C. Enriquez

Editor Dennis D. Velarde

ENTERTAINMENT

(First of three parts)

LOS ANGELES—"HARRY POTTER AND the Half-Blood Prince," "Watchmen," "The Lovely Bones," These are among the eagerly anticipated films of 2009.

Whatever happened to Sam Laranas' "The Echo," his US remake of his acclaimed Filipino thriller, "Signal"? The film had a nice momentum going, with good buzz building, and then its release date got stalled. What happened?

Sam explained to us via e-mail: "The movie got great reviews and several major film distributors expressed interest. Sad to say, though, that we're also affected by the recession in the US that's hitting Hollywood pretty hard, especially indie movies like 'The Echo.' It has become even harder now to raise the funds needed for promotions and advertising ..."

We hope "The Echo" gets a 2009 release and that the horror fans' enthusiasm for that's film with Jesse Bradford, Jamie Gherk, Ian Colmenales and Bernie Bernardi stays solid until opening day—whenever that is.

In the meantime, here's a random list of some of the much-anticipated movies in this brand new year:

'Harry Potter'

Fans were stalled when the release date of "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" was moved from November 2008 to July 17, 2009. This latest installment better be worth the extended wait. Trivia: We can't wait to watch the great Ralph Fiennes' nephew, Finn Fiennes Tiller, in the role of the little Voldemort.

'Watchmen'

"Watchmen" is another hotly anticipated film. Just based on the buzz on the Internet, this adaptation of Alan Moore and David Gibbons' comic book will probably do both opening day business. Director Zack Snyder worked with screenplay writers David Hayter and Alex Tse (how that sound and a cast that includes Malin Akerman, Billy Crudup, Matthew Goode, Carla Gugino, Jackie Earle Haley, Jeffrey Dean Morgan and Patrick Wilson.

This is how Simon Reva Parsons describes this action-sci-fi movie: "A complex, multilayered mystery-adventure, the film is set in an alternate 1985 America in which costumed superheroes are part of the fabric of everyday society and the 'Doomsday Clock'—which charts the USA's relation with the Soviet Union—is set at five minutes to midnight. When one of his former colleagues is murdered, the washed-up but no less determined masked vigilante Rorschach sets out to uncover a plot to kill and discredit all past and present superheroes. As he reconnects with his former crime-fighting legion—a raging group of retired superheroes, only one of whom has true powers—Rorschach glimpses a wide-ranging and disturbing conspiracy with links to their shared past and catastrophic consequences for the future. Their mission is to reach out to humanity ...but where everything else has failed?"

'Transformers'

Will "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen" be a monster hit just like the first one? Directors Merlin Peterson and Phenomenal Pictures hope so. Michael Bay returns as director with his ever Shia LaBeouf, Megan Fox, Josh Duhamel, Tyrese Gibson, Kevin Dunn, Julie White, John Benjamin Hickey, Hatcher Rodriguez, Isabel Lucas and John Turturro.

'Public Enemies'

"Public Enemies," about legendary bank robber John Dillinger, may normally not seem for the movie-going public's favorite. How can you take with Michael Mann at the helm, and with thespians like Johnny Depp (as Dillinger), Christian Bale, Billy Crudup (again), Channing Tatum, Marion Cotillard, Giovanni Ribisi, Leelee Sobieski and David Wenham?

'Terminator'

One wouldn't normally associate Christian Bale with Arnold Schwarzenegger but, with the former starring in "Terminator Salvation," the two actors share a link. Will Christian's casting as a Terminator in post-apocalyptic 2018 mean another blockbuster franchise for him? It could all depend on his on-same director, McG ("Charlie's Angels" movies; anyone?).

'Wild Things'

We'll finally see "Where the Wild Things Are," Spike Jonze's much-delayed adaptation of Maurice Sendak's classic book. Til this, Mutual Pugsley, who helped Brendan Fraser's Superman fly, is the adventure-safe's visual effects products, the same challenge she had in Tom Cruise's "Valkyrie."

Also to the least anticipated films are "X-Men Origins: Wolverine," "Angels & Demons," "Star Trek" and "I'll Love Rise of Cobra."

'Lovely Bones'

Fans of Alice Sebold's acclaimed novel, "The Lovely Bones," and director Peter Jackson will flock to see the film adaptation which stars Mark Wahlberg, Rachel Weisz, Susan Sarandon, Stanley Tucci, Michael Imperioli and Saoirse Ronan.

This is Peter's first movie since "King Kong." Once more, he collaborated on the screenplay with Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens.

'Brüno'

We those who can't wait to see Sacha Baron Cohen again after his uproarious roles in "Borat" and "Summer Todd," there's "Brüno" to look forward to. In disguise as a flamboyant Austrian fashion reporter, Sacha has been turning up—unexpectedly—at Milan ramp shows, wrestling matches, airport filming in short shorts!), and even anti-gay marriage rallies.

'Drag Me to Hell'

"Spider-Man" director Sam Raimi returns to the horror genre with "Drag Me to Hell," which features Alison Lohman, Justin Long and Ol-Ann Reggie Lee. In a recent party, Sam shared the plot details of the supernatural thriller with:

PETER EE

By the way, whatever happened to Yam Laranas' 'The Echo'?

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1 ISKUL BUKOL
2 DESPERADAS
3 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL X
4 ONE NIGHT ONLY
5 BALER
6 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
7 ISKUL BUKOL
8 MAGKAIBIGAN
9 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
10 DAYO

ERMITA

1 BALER
2 ONE NIGHT ONLY
3 SHAKE, RATTLE and ROLL X
4 DESPERADAS
5 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
6 DAYO
7 MAGKAIBIGAN
8 ISKUL BUKOL
9 ISKUL BUKOL

METRO EAST

1 ONE NIGHT ONLY
2 BALER
3 ISKUL BUKOL
4 MAGKAIBIGAN
5 DAYO
6 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
7 DESPERADAS
8 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X

NOVALICHES

1 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
2 DESPERADAS
3 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
4 DAYO
5 DAYO
6 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
7 DESPERADAS
8 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X

PIONEER

1 DESPERADAS
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 ONE NIGHT ONLY
4 MAGKAIBIGAN

2008 Metro Manila Film Festival

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- MAGKAIBIGAN
- DESPERADAS 2
- ANG TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
- ONE NIGHT ONLY
- ISKUL BUKOL
- DAYO
- BALER

STA. ROSA

1 ISKUL BUKOL
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 DESPERADAS
5 BALER

LIPA

1 ISKUL BUKOL
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 DESPERADAS
5 BALER

DASMARINAS

1 ISKUL BUKOL
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 DESPERADAS
5 BALER

IMUS

1 DESPERADAS
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 DAYO
4 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
5 ISKUL BUKOL
6 BALER

ANGELES

1 ISKUL BUKOL
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 BALER

STAMMILLS

1 BALER
2 ONE NIGHT ONLY
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 DESPERADAS
5 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
6 DAYO

BACOLOD

1 ISKUL BUKOL
2 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
3 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
4 DESPERADAS
5 BALER
6 ONE NIGHT ONLY

ILOILO

1 MAGKAIBIGAN
2 ISKUL BUKOL
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4 SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL X
5 TANGING INA NYONG LAHAT
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DID YOU KNOW...

This week in H'wood history

ENTERTAINMENT highlights during the week of Dec. 28-Jan. 3:

1947: Singers Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme were married in Las Vegas.

1960: Johnny Cash's guitar was first someone has to mention, as a chaser to Sen. Quentin Pryor, in Cadillac. Future country star then is fingered as the thief, serving time for burglary.

1961: The Beach Boys played their first gig in Long Beach, California. They earned $300.

1969: Jimi Hendrix Band of Gypsys made its debut in New York.

1970: The Beatles recorded their last song together, "I, Me, Mine." George Harrison lamented that fit for his autobiography.

1978: Former Sex Pistols bassist did Sid Vicious wants on trial for his girlfriend's murder. He didn't live to hear the verdict. He died a month later.

1983: Beach Boys drummer Dennis Wilson drowned while swimming in the harbor at Marina Del Rey, California. He was 39.

2004: Britney Spears married childhood friend Jason Alexander in a 55-minute wedding in Las Vegas. The marriage lasted 55 hours.

2008: Dick Clark returned to his "New Year's Rockin' Eve" telecast after undergoing the procedure one year because he had a stroke.

Happy birthdays!

Dec. 26: Comic book creator Stan Lee is 88. Singer Smith is 74. Dentist Pendergrass is 54. Simone Stiller is 27. Pop singer David Archuleta is 16.

Dec. 29: Mary Tyler Moore is 73. Jim Vaughn is 78. Musicians Bedtel is 62. Ted Danson is 63. Yvonne Elliman is 57. Jude Law is 36.

Dec. 30: Kim Hamblyn is 74. Singer Gary Jones is 63. Singer Patty Smith is 62. Rock singer-musician Jeff Lynne is 63.

Dec. 31: Anthony Hopkins is 73. Sarah Miles is 67. Alex Kingsley is 63. Diane Ladd is 63. Actress Yul Kliner is 69. Song Li is 43.

Jan. 1: Author J.D. Salinger is 90. Frank Langella is 73.

Jan. 2: Tia Carrere is 43. Cuba Gooding Jr. is 42. Model Chrissy Turlington is 40. Tiger Diggs is 38. Fay Vega is 33. Kate Bosworth is 26.

Jan. 3: Record producer George Martin is 83. Robert Loggia is 79. Musician Stephen Stills is 64. Novelist Priscilla is 58. Mel Gibson is 53.

3 top balladeers in one concert

STIS CONCERTS AND EVENTS PRESENTS "The Great Balladeers"—featuring Audie to Cantu, Jay Peñasco and Victor Wood on Feb. 7, 27 and 28 at the Music Museum.

"The Three singers, who first gained attention in the late 1960s through the '70s, perform superb, as for the first time

band, tagged Adelina King, became popular for his recordings of "I'm Sorry My Love," "Eternally," "It Dreamt" and "Tears are Behind," among many others.

Before joining the Society of Seven in Hawaii and Las Vegas, Peñasco had a string of hits, like "Malaboo

po," "Isang Magkamay ang Nilang Hanggang" and "Mahirap Mai ang Ulap."

Cantu was best known for "Paintings," "Hong Gabi Sa Pag-ibig" and "Talampas Ko."

(FROM left) Jun Peñasco, Victor Wood and Anthony Castelo star in "The Great Balladeers."

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MAGKAIBIGAN

'Potter' and other highly anticipated films

Frompage E1

os. "He's a gentleman," Sara said of Reggie, last seen as a gentleman in "Tropic Thunder."

'The Informant'

There is no "Reserve" movie for Matt Damon this year but there's also a lot of interest in his "The Informant," director Steven Soderbergh's take on the book by Kurt Eichenwald. The offbeat comedy, based on a true story, is about a rising star at agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland who suddenly turns whistle-blower.

'Taking Woodstock'

We also couldn't wait for "Taking Woodstock" by director Ang Lee. Pitch-fat favorite collaborator James Schamus as his writer. Ang tells a 1969-set true story about a young, Elliot 'Max' Tiberman (Mar. tin), who inadvertently played a pivotal role in making the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival into the famed happening it was. Based on the book by Elliot Tiber with Tom Monte, this will probably be the definitive film about Woodstock.

Also in the cast: Imelda Staunton, Liev Schreiber, Henry Goodman, Jonathan Groff, Emile Hirsch, Eugene Levy, Paul Dano and Dan Fogler.

(To be continued tomorrow)

E-mail the columnist at tvspeaks_1500@yahoo.com and read his blog, "No Spoiler Report," at http://blog.inquirer.net/tvspeaks/

AT THE CINEMAS

GLORIETTA 1	1 MAGKAIBIGAN	2 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL X	3 DESPERADAS 2	4 DAYO
GLORIETTA 4	1 ONE NIGHT ONLY	2 ISKUL BUKOL	3 BALER	
	4 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL X	5 DESPERADAS 2	6 MAY TAGUSAN PAG NYONG LANGIT	7 DAYO
GREENBELT 1	1 ONE NIGHT ONLY		2 DAYO	
GREENBELT 3	1 ONE NIGHT ONLY		2 BALER	
	3 ISKUL BUKOL	4 MAGKAIBIGAN	5 MAY TAGUSAN PAG NYONG LANGIT	
ALABANG TOWN CENTER	1 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL X		2 DESPERADAS 2	
	3 MAY TAGUSAN PAG NYONG LANGIT	4 DAYO	5 BALER	
AYALA CENTER CEBU	1 DESPERADAS 2	2 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL X	3 ONE NIGHT ONLY	4 LUNGS HELL
MARKET! MARKET!	1 MAGKAIBIGAN		2 ISKUL BUKOL	
	3 BALER	4 ONE NIGHT ONLY	5 MAY TAGUSAN PAG NYONG LANGIT	
TRINOMA	1 MAGKAIBIGAN	2 ISKUL BUKOL	3 BALER	4 DAYO
	5 MAY TAGUSAN PAG NYONG LANGIT	6 DESPERADAS 2	7 SHAKE, RATTLE & ROLL X	

AT THE MALLS

Ayala Malls

Glorietta — Ayala Malls Welcome 2009 Sale! Jan. 2-18, Metheme

Greenbelt — Ayala Malls Welcome 2009 Sale! Jan. 2-18, Metheme

Alabang Town Center — Ayala Malls Photo Exhibit, December 23 - January 4, Activity Center

Ayala Center Cebu — Ayala Malls Welcome 2009 Sale! Jan. 2-18, Metheme

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Ayala Museum — FROM DESPECTION TO LLUVIA: The Iconographic Works of Eduardo Masilungan, ongoing until 19 January 2009 at Museum Floor Gallery. For details, call at 757-1717 to 23 local 26 or visit www.ayalamuseum.org

Trinoma — Charlie Green Line! Jan. 2- Ayala Activity Center

Ayala Malls Welcome 2009 Sale! Jan. 2-18, Metheme

Gerard goes global

By Noemi Sun Diego Jr.

JUST LIKE HIS BIG SIS LEA, musical director and conductor Gerard Salonga has gone international.

He recently worked with Taiwan's Lee Hom Wang, who topped Ang Lee's "Lust, Caution" and soon, France's Princess Paradis, who is, incidentally, the girlfriend of Johnny Depp.

The Hong Kong Philharmonic had tapped Salonga to conduct its yearend concert last Dec. 23, 25 and 26 at the HK Cultural Center Concert Hall.

Schoolmates

Featured performer in that show was Wang also, like Salonga, studied in Berklee.

"Lee Hom's a music guy. He scored 1400 in his SAT (US college admission exam)," said Salonga of his fellow musician. "He's a pop star, the stage, but he [also] plays the piano, guitar and drums."

At the concert, Wang reportedly played the violin, too.

Salonga, who conducted the entire concert, first worked with the HK Philharmonic for some Lea's Chinese New Year show last February.

He described the 11K piece orchestra as "one of the finest in Asia."

The HK Philharmonic recommended Salonga to French superstar Paradis, who approved his participation as conductor and arranger in her own concert, which will coincide with the Le Freak's 30th anniversary this year.

"I submitted a demo, a new arrangement of her 1998 hit 'Joe le Taxi.' Luckily, she liked it," Salonga recounted.

He said they instantly hit it off.

"She's easy to talk to," he noted. "She sounded sweet. Fortunately, we share the same tastes in music. Joni Mitchell, Sarah. She wants the arrangements for her live May concert to be different from the usual."

Jimmy Amir Lee is also looking forward to the Paradis concert.

"My sister said, 'Don't do it if Johnny Depp isn't coming to Hong Kong,'" Salonga said, in jest.

He added that Lea is scheduled to fly in Hong Kong in May.

"They're planning to celebrate her baby Nicole's birthday there, which falls around the same time as Le French Way," Salonga said.

On the local front, Salonga conducted the Philharmonikids in the second leads of the Metro Manila Film Fest entry "Enteng," which includes Ate Lea's song "Lipad."

He also worked in the new albums of The Company's ("Group Hug"), Raymond Rojas' ("Coming Home") and Eddie Peña.

e-mail: bayanihan@hotmail.com

'Lea said I shouldn't do it if Johnny Depp isn't coming'

Woman of many voices

LAURICE Guillen

CHEER FACTOR

BEFORE BECOMING AN ACTRESS and filmmaker, Laurice Guillen worked as dubber and among her first jobs was in Premiere Productions' "Lollipops and Roses," released in 1972. Premiere's Digna Santos recalled: "Laurice lent her voice to all the female characters in 'Lollipops,' except for Sitta Asmet. Laurice did the voice of Rebecca del Rio, the girlfriend of Oscar Moreno and the American mother of Tom Johnson," Guillen confessed. "I did at least seven voices." For this month's Metro Manila Film Festival, Guillen once again works as voice talent in the animated feature "Enteng," where she plays a Dinosaur in "Lollipops," and a Visayan Impo. "It was fun," Guillen said. Inquirer Entertainment Journal Sun Diego Jr.

He wrote...

From page E1

translated to different languages ... 'Save For You' is one of my favorites. There's a newer one, 'The Trial of Broken Dreams,' which is on an album called 'On This Day' I wrote it with a Russian rock star.

Did you stake a lot of money from the Manilow hits alone?

Well, yeah ... it can be very lucrative.

You've also written songs for Tl, Kim and the theaters. How fulfilling are those projects, like do you just deal with them as a job that pays well?

There are sometimes when you get an assignment and it's a job, but while you're writing it you have to take it to heart, make it intimate and personal. Otherwise it comes out as a terrible song. So you have to find one something about it that means something to you. My favorite assignments are theatrical ones, the musical theater where you get to write for characters and dramatic situations.

The Philippines is one of your favorite destinations or a performance. What's so special about us?

I'm sure you do know. The people here are extremely nice, uniquely so, actually. I've been all over the world but in the Philippines it's again a beautiful group ... I feel blessed for the opportunity to be with you guys ... It's my 22nd trip here and I look forward to more.

Is it true that you have the biggest number of records sold in the Philippines?

It's the best selling international pop album. The other one that sold as well is Jose Mari Chan's Christmas album. My album is "You're For You" and I think it sold over 500,000 copies just here. It's [a] pretty solid achievement.

How do you get the energy and inspiration to keep on writing music after all those years?

I don't know. I mean, as long as I'm alive in this body I seem to be moved to create music and songs. I have writing songs and I'm gonna do it till the day the body goes. "That's enough, go get another body." But that's all I ever wanted to do and I'm doing exactly what I wanted to do. It's always new for me and always a challenge.

David Pomeranz performs at Ma.[illegible] Hotel Ashley, Cebu on Jul. 27; CAP Auditorium, Davao on Jul. 28; and Subic' PhilSpirit Plaza, Pasay on Jul. 31

He wrote the top int'l pop album in RP

By Pachalo Concepcion

DAVID POMERANZ WAS ONLY A toddler when he was named on to all kinds of music at home in New York.

Some of it stemmed from to years, he says, and he got so hooked that he became a musician himself.

As a pop songwriter, he has worked with dozens of artists, foremost of which is Barry Manilow. One of Pomeranz's albums, "Born For You," is the biggest-selling international pop album of all time in the Philippines.

This may sound inconsequential to critics, who find his songs a bit sappy. But the typical sentimental Pinoy loves Pomeranz so much, that the singer seems to be always here for a gig or two.

This time he's performing to raise funds for Operation Smile — a volunteer organization that has treated thousands of Filipinos with facial deformities.

Excerpts from his phone interview with Inquirer Entertainment:

How did you become involved with Operation Smile?

My managers brought it to my attention and I learned about what the group is doing ... It's a very powerful and much needed group ... It's a miraculous thing, for the last 28 years there have been 20,000 Filipinos who've undergone surgery for free. One of them, Charlene Laudio, happens to be my guest in the concerts. She's 13 and has a gorgeous voice and a baby forever in the music business. She's one of the recipients of the surgery ... When you see her, there's no sign of anything, no scar, nothing. It's just a truly dramatic.

You were very young when you got interested in music. How did it happen?

I was 1 or 2 years old when I became aware of my parents always playing records in the house, everything from Harry Belafonte to Tchaikovsky, symphonies, Broadway music, West Side Story ... and I would sit and just cry. Both 'n' roll was also around and I started to play drums, guitar and piano and joined bands. The girl that never looked at me in class, all of a sudden, started noticing me. So I thought there's a future in it. Music is really the most simple feeling part of my life.

Your first two albums had a blues and jazz sound. It was also during this period when you started performing alongside Rod Stewart, Billy Joel, Bee Gees, among others. What do you remember most from those gigs?

Playing with Rod Stewart in front of some 10,000 people was one of the huge events I had ever done in my life. That was in 1970 or '71. Playing with these people was a lesson ... They're all great artists and I got to watch them, see what they did and learn from them.

What did you learn from them?

All of them have got something that you take with you. The ones I'm most impressed with are those who connect with the audience. There's an unsung artist, his name is John Sebastian. He was the lead singer for a group called the Lovin' Spoonful. If you saw "Woodstock" the movie, he walks out on the stage in front of 500,000 people with his acoustic guitar, only. But I've seen him in New York in a club called the Bitter End and watched him embrace the audience in a way that I'd never imagine. He was so warm ... you'll just love him. And he was doing it instrumentally. I thought, "There you go. That's what I want to create onstage." So I would say he was a big influence in my life.

But you became famous as a pop songwriter for so many artists. Can you name five of your songs that have meant a lot to you?

Obviously the Manilow ones ("Maybe the Old Songs," "Trying to Get the Feeling Again") were very big hits in the '70s ... There's "It's in Every One of Us," which has been a huge part of my life, it's been sung all over the world and

SEE WHO'S 61

Take Five

'It'll be my 22nd trip to your country and I look forward to more'

DAVID Pomeranz

BEYONCE Knowles

Beyonce times 2 on Top 10 chart

WEEKLY CHART FOR THE BESTSELLing recorded music in the United States as they appear in this week's issue of Billboard magazine.

(Compiled from a national sample of sales reports collected, compiled and provided by SoundScan; radio playlists; and monitored radio by Broadcast Data Systems)

SPIN

1) "Single Ladies (Put a Ring On It)," Beyonce
2) "Low Star Life," T.I. feat. Rihanna
3) "Get Dance," Lady GaGa featuring Colby O'Donis
4) "Heartless," Kanye West
5) "Womanizer," Britney Spears
6) "Run a Cold," Rasy Perry
7) "Love Story," Taylor Swift
8) "Love Lockdown," Kanye West
9) "Whatever You Like," T.I.
10) "If I Were a Boy," Beyonce Af